

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE FRENCH NOVEL

(1890)

IT has frequently been observed by critical persons who have dealt with French literature, that its long and scarcely interrupted course illustrates the development and morphology of literary kinds, better than almost any other literature is able to do. In few cases, if in any, is this remark better illustrated than in the case of fiction—even of prose fiction, the history of which is in most other nations so short and so late. It is tolerably certain that the prose romance originated, with hardly any foreign stimulus, in France, or at any rate in French-speaking countries, by the latter part of the twelfth century. Some Italian aid may have been required to turn the indigenous verse *fabliau* into the prose *conte*, but this influence—as later with that of Spain in the seventeenth century, of Germany and England in the nineteenth—was mastered and absorbed by the strong literary

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genius of the people. And always as we go on—through the curious and versatile work of which the chief instance is Rabelais' ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} great book; through the transformed romance of the early seventeenth century, with its increased observation of actual life (which sometimes became, as with Sorel, Furetière, and Scarron, almost direct observation); the rise, with a great foreign posterity, of romance of yet another kind under Lesage; the half-burlesque, half-satirical *contes* of Hamilton and the eighteenth century tale-tellers; the sensibility novels of the same period; and lastly, after the old government and the old order had changed, the immense outburst of prose fiction, which, induced directly by the influence of Scott, has lasted from 1830 till the present time,—we find the same manifest and manifold sympathy between almost all kinds of prose fiction and the genius of the French nation. Full proof of and full comment on this must be sought elsewhere, though, in reference to considerable parts of the history, it will be found in the present volume. In this particular essay or chapter I deal only with the most immediate and actual side of the matter—the present state and prospects of the French novel. Since I wrote, in the *Fortnightly Review* for the year 1878, the articles which will be found later, on the chief French novelists of the century, wide gaps have been made in the list of those who were even then living. Sandeau is gone, and Flaubert, and About;

M. Droz has long given up the practice of those delicately indelicate stories of which
 THE FRENCH NOVEL. *Monsieur, Madame, et Bébé, and Entre Nous* are the very model, has passed from gallantry to devotion, and has in *Tristesses et Sourires* become edifying though not dull. M. Cherbuliez has not abandoned the novel, but has, since his academicianship, given himself more and more to politics, and has certainly done nothing equal to *Meta Holdenis* or the *Roman d'une Honnête Femme*. Of all the veterans, M. Feuillet alone is now writing; and though his later works have shown no loss of delicacy and some gain in healthiness, he is past the age of masterpieces, and not much more, masterly or not masterly, can be expected from him.

It can hardly be said that the place of these masters, or at least of the best of them, has been taken; but substitutes of a kind have of course arisen, and not a few writers, who at the former date were comparative novices, have either gained a wider popularity or have at any rate increased their volume of work. M. Zola, M. Daudet, M. André Theuriet, M. Ohnet, Madame Henry Gréville, M. Paul Bourget, M. Guy de Maupassant, the group of followers in Drozian steps, of whom the chief are M. Asmand Silvestre, "Gyp," and the "Vicomte Richard O'Monroy," together with a few others, deserve some individual mention, and we may then proceed to classify them a little,

and to indicate some general critical considerations.

We must begin with such a Jove as ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} the subject affords, the naturalist Zeus, the dirt-compeller. The popularity of M. Zola does not indeed surprise me, for there has always been a very considerable demand for obscene books ; and when customers can get them without let or hindrance at a moderate price, and with no loss of reputation if they are seen carrying them away, it is not to be supposed that the demand will be greatly lessened, at any rate for a time. Of course I admit that M. Zola is not a caterer for Holywell Street, pure and simple. No competent critic of literature can refuse admiration to much of the *Contes à Ninon*, or to such an admirable story as that "Attaque du Moulin," which opens the *Soirées de Médan*, a story yielding to hardly anything of its kind in French, and worthy in its different style to be ranked not far below the "Prise de la Redoute" of Mérimée, which is the *Wandering Willie's Tale* (only not supernatural) of French literature. Again, the first part—the first hundred pages or so—of *L'Œuvre* could not, in its style, be very much better than it is. But M. Zola obviously has not the faculty of writing a long story that shall be a story, and according to the wont of many other men of talent who are not men of genius, he is perpetually trying to do by the wrong means what he cannot do by the right. His wearisome nonsense of "documents,"

his working in (with a delightful unconsciousness of the bitter satire which his master
THE FRENCH NOVEL. Flaubert had already poured on the practice in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*) of a kind of small encyclopædia of elaborate information into each book, his photographs of the ugly and disgusting, his actual obscenity itself, are all (and all, I repeat, no doubt unconsciously) attempts to get at the secret of the interesting, attempts to secure customers, very much as the legendary barber offered a glass of pine-apple rum to everybody who would come and be shaved, or as some shopkeepers put packets of doubtful sweetmeats into parcels of more doubtful tea. His purely literary merits—intense realisation of object, vivid if coarse phrasing, and sometimes, but much more rarely, a knack of seizing snatches and scraps of character—would secure him a very small audience without his illegitimate attractions; and though I admit, of course, that it does not follow that every one who admires M. Zola admires him directly and consciously for his filth, it is undeniably his filth which makes him popular. I do not know any really competent literary critic of any European country who admires M. Zola, without such large restrictions and deductions as render his admiration almost worthless. And, indeed, it would be odd if it were otherwise, for M. Zola's process is the negation of the first rule of literature, which is that what is presented shall be presented not

merely as it is, but transformed, and, if I may say so, *disrealised*. He is a strong and a capable artist who has gone ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} about to break the rules of art, and in that old contest we know which is the victor. In his latest works, *La Terre*, *Le Rêve*, *La Bête Humaine*, M. Zola has exhibited not merely what may be called the qualities of his faculty, but also the defects of his method, perhaps more remarkably than ever. *La Terre* was by common consent his farthest excursion, and is perhaps the farthest excursion possible, on the quest after a representation of man and nature which shall be not *disrealised* but *disidealised*, which shall be confined to the merely ugly, base, and low, to the study of degradation and deformity, and to the study even of these things from what may be called the purely police-court and reporter point of view. The curious book called *Le Rêve*, whether it was or was not a mere bravado to show how the method could be applied without what is commonly called coarseness, illustrated its defects as well as *Germinal* or *La Terre* itself. *La Bête Humaine*, a relapse into the older style, was, by common consent, one of the least interesting of what some call the master's works. Indeed, M. Zola's procedure could hardly fail to pall. Whether there is, besides a great vigour of speech and an undoubted faculty of photographic representation, any properly literary quality left in him, is a question on which I am at issue with a

few, though very few, critics of importance. But his system of getting up, exactly as though he were going in for a competitive examination, the technicalities of some subject, is bound to disgust sooner or later all readers who have even an unconscious sense of literary fitness. It is horticultural botany in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, perhaps the best of all his books, the book in which he had gained complete command of his pen, and had not yet denied art and deserted the ideal; medical matters in *Pot-Bouille* and *La Joie de Vivre*; ecclesiology in *Le Rêve*; railway terms in *La Bête Humaine*; other things elsewhere;—but whatever it is, the most it can do is to produce a sham appearance of that reality which is only to be reached by inventive skill and artistically heightened representation. Much more frequently it can only weary and disgust. Also, though he is much stronger than his masters in part, *les deux Goncourt*, he does not possess that rather sickly but still curious refinement of style which may possibly preserve them long after he has passed away. For pass away he must, having neither of the two and the only two lasting qualities of literature. One of these is style, the other is the artistic presentation of matter. The first he probably could not have attained, except in a few passages, if he would; the second he has deliberately rejected, and so the mother of dead dogs awaits him sooner or later.

M. Alphonse Daudet is a very different person,

though I have never myself been able to share the admiration with which some people regard him. The two (now three) ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} *Tartarins* and such stories of his as the "Chèvre de M. Séguin" (an imperishable thing), can never be praised or read too much. Tartarin himself is one of the figures which will not die, and I really do not know that he has had an equal in this immortality since Jerome Paturot, while his creator considerably exceeds Reybaud in purely literary skill. But professed Daudetists would think scorn of any one who regarded his idol as the creator of Tartarin, and the charming, ill-fated, too symbolical she-goat. They rest his fame on the "great works," on the series from *Le Petit Chose* (if indeed they would admit *Le Petit Chose*, which I think nearly the best of the whole) to *L'Immortel*. My own attitude to this Daudet cult is, I am sorry to say, the dissidence of dissent. *Jack* and *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné* are better than their followers, but the imitation of Dickens, which is flagrant in them and in their successors, even down to *Port Tarascon*, is a grave fault. The taste of *Les Rois en Exile* is abominable; that of *Le Nabab* as bad or worse; that of *Numa Roumestan* not much better. For all appeal principally to the low and vulgar interest of "books with keys," books in which living persons are supposed to be sketched and satirised. And then we come to that curious pair *L'Évangéliste* and *Sapho*, where the naturalist *griffe* seems to have impressed itself

well on M. Daudet's shoulder. But his faults rose to a climax which seems never likely to be surpassed in *L'Immortel*. THE FRENCH NOVEL. The French Academy is not so sacred a body that it may not be attacked and satirised, and it may possibly be true that M. Daudet so mixed his facts and so invented his fictions that he did not directly, and in such a manner as could be brought home in a court of law, or even a court of honour, accuse one actual academician of having gained his place by sending his wife about to be kissed by aged literary libertines, or another of insulting the daughters of academic aspirants, when, to gain grace for their fathers, they act as his amanuenses. But he managed adroitly enough to give the whole book a flavour of personal scandal of the kind, and so to secure its popularity with those who like such scandal. This, as it seems to me, is a baser and more unliterary thing than personalities even as outrageous as those of our own worst days of journalism. Other faults of his are so much the fault of naturalism in general, that what I shall have to say on naturalism generally will almost apply to them. Its dulness appears most in *L'Évangéliste*, its dirtiness most in *Sapho*, though both, especially the second, are redeemed in some measure by the fact that M. Daudet, unlike M. Zola, and to an extent not reached by any of the younger French novelists, can conceive a human being, and not merely a Frenchman, first dwarfed to a Parisian,

and then dwarfed further to a Parisian according to certain fancies and fashions. It is undoubtedly his power over the ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} human that has got him (and so far deservedly) his popularity. But it is lamentable to think how little use he has made of that popularity, how he has prostituted it to vulgar personal curiosity and other things nearly (nothing is quite) as bad. That *Tartarin* will save him I do not doubt, but it will be so as by fire.

That extraordinary, or at first sight extraordinary phenomenon, the popularity of M. Ohnet, first escaped and then puzzled Frenchmen much more than it did English critics—an incident merely illustrative of old proverbs about lookers-on. Of late, no doubt, M. Jules Lemaître and other lively and sprightly writers have taken up the pen of protest; but I should like to be quite sure that the enormous sale of the books—the batch of six or seven has reached, I believe, collectively much more than a thousand editions—has not stirred up active jealousy to the help of sluggish criticism. *Serge Panine* and *Le Maître de Forges* very early struck not acuter but less interested judges as possessing all the qualities which obtain and deserve a real and immediate popularity. What Mr. Lewis Morris is in England to a perfect poet in the abstract and to the best poets of the day in the concrete, that M. Georges Ohnet is, exactly, to a perfect novelist in the abstract and to the best or most prominent

novelists of the day in the concrete. The remark
that popularity of this sort depends
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not impressively or insolently, above
his audience—above them at a height to
which they can easily rise, while such little effort
as the rising gives them excites a pleasurable
sense of effort, intelligence, and virtue—is a
commonplace of the more abstract criticism. It
is excellently exemplified by M. Ohnet, who has
the further gift of mixing his attractions with
great skill and impartiality. He has a style on
which experts look down, but which is a little
above the ordinary newspaper writer. His stories,
not immoderately interesting, have a certain
attraction of plot; his characters, not quite alive,
are a long way above the mere mannikins of the
average novelist. He does a little cautious but
stimulating indelicacy, has a touch of “document,”
and blends it (a wondrous mixture!) with a touch
of romance. And so he hits that many-winged
bird the public on all its wings. He has met
indeed a terrible enemy in the implacable and
redoubtable “Gyp,” who with a pen far skilfuler
than his and the *expertise* of a lady, has made
equal merriment of his French and his manners,
of his emotions and his ideas of high life; But this
does not interfere with the thousand editions.
To be crowned by the Academy, and yet write
a scene describing in full the advantage which a
French gentleman takes when a French lady is

thrown on his hospitality, is indeed to score with both barrels. Such a success would, no doubt, be impossible either at a ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} time when there were many good novelists, or when those who were good were very good ; but M. Ohnet just attains the happy and contemptible mean between a number of extremes, and he has his reward. Naturally the extremes are all very angry, which need not disturb us.

No other novelist can touch the popularity, as evidenced by editions, of these three writers and of M. Feuillet when he still writes. Of the rest, there is no one who seems to me welcomed so much below his desert as M. André Theuriet. He has more than once got into considerable circulation, but it has usually been, I will not say by pandering, but by descending to the popular taste for a certain sort of incident, as in *Sauvageonne* and *Au Paradis des Enfants*, though the latter, as it seems to me, is the weakest book he has written. But if he will not give them a seduction or an adultery, his French readers leave, in third or fifth or seventh editions (which is equivalent with us to a difficult sale of the first), stories which, in a certain pure and unaffected style, in straightforward and unhesitating but cleanly grasp of character, and, above all, in sympathetic but not too florid description of nature, are surpassed by no work of the day. Richard Jefferies himself could not have bettered

M. Theuriet's treatment of the woods of his beloved Lorraine or the plains of the Loire; while in conception of human life, not in the least squeamish but not limited to certain sides only, no living French novelist except M. Daudet is his superior. Scarcely so much can be said of Madame Henry Gréville, and the reason is very clear: no mortal can write novels as this clever lady has been writing them for the last ten years, and write them good. But her Russian stories are not (as I believe is sometimes thought in England) her only good ones, and in such books as *Rose Rozien* and *Cité Ménard*, the capacity which has been unluckily frittered away is evident enough.

In coming to M. Paul Bourget and M. Guy de Maupassant I come to dangerous ground. Both are representative figures of the newest school of novel-writing in France, and both are exceedingly clever men. "I think myself that M. de Maupassant is the most really gifted writer, both in prose and verse, that has appeared in France for more than twenty years; and I am sure that the country has not in that time had a more careful, learned, and accomplished craftsman—in verse and prose—than M. Bourget. But one devil seems to me to have entered into M. de Maupassant, and two devils—two very bad devils—indeed—into M. Bourget. Both seem to think it absolutely necessary to transgress into subjects popularly known

as "forbidden"—a phrase which, in France at least, seems to mean that a popular writer is 'forbidden to take up any other. One seems to think it necessary to treat those subjects, and all subjects, with that dreary analysis, falsely so called, which the New World has sent with the Colorado beetle, and the phylloxera, and a hundred other plagues, to punish the rashness of Columbus and the crimes of his followers of all nations. Now as for Devil No. 1 it is awkward speaking. I profess myself to be absolutely free from squeamishness. I still think the condemners of Baudelaire's condemned poems fools for their pains. I am still a faithful lover of Madeleine de Maupin, and I think, to come to close quarters, M. de Maupassant's own *Boule de Suif* one of the most finished and delightful pieces of tragic comedy that our age has produced. But if we are to be "pagan," let us in the first place for Heaven's sake remember that the pagan Pantheon *was* a Pantheon; that your Greek did not worship the god who rhymes to "bedrape us" all day long and every day in the year. And let us in the second place remember that both that disproportioned deity and his comelier mother were in their original functions and capacities "very merry, laughing, quaffing, and unthinking" divinities, quite good-natured, unless people blasphemed them (which I have not the least intention of doing), and busy in their rather irregular fashion with making people happy

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and comfortable. "Our Lady of Pain" is quite a modern invention; she never gave pain in the old times to any one who did not go out of his or her way to resist or slight her deity. Now these two things your modern pagan novelists, and especially those two very clever ones of whom I am more particularly speaking, do constantly neglect. M. de Maupassant is quite independent of his favourite motive as a mere stimulus, but he seems to drag it in as if it bewitched him. He can write on little else; nor should I care if his writing on little else gave us always or often such true and strange tragedy as in *M. Parent*; such admirable satire and tragi-comic portraiture as in the little masterpiece already mentioned; even such Aristophanic comedy as *Les Sœurs Rondoli*. But it does not. In most of his longer works and many of his shorter pieces, though there is generally vigorous writing and constantly a creative or interpretative touch (for M. de Maupassant, as has been said, is a poet), the naturalist dulness and the naturalist dirtiness strive for the mastery in a monotonous wrestle. Once indeed, and fortunately of late, though his work since has not kept the level, M. de Maupassant has shown what he can do,—what French novel-writing, when it throws off the naturalist and pessimist yoke, will do,—in the admirable novel of *Pierre et Jean*. This is itself not exactly a story for the young person, but it is handled in such a manner that, as in all great

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handling of such or any other matters, the mere attraction of the "improper" is not felt at all. Pierre's mother might never have ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} misconducted herself, his friend of the *brasserie* might be a *rosière* of the purest kind for all that the reader cares, except as these things bear on the story. I have no hesitation in calling *Pierre et Jean* the best French novel which has been written since 1870.

As for M. Bourget, he is never exactly 'dirty', but he appears to be under a complete obsession of erotic ideas—under a kind of *névrose*, to use the appropriate slang. In one of his stories (I think *L'Irréparable* was published before M. Ohnet, greatly daring, conceived the idea above referred to) a gentleman of fashion and family plays the complete part of Lovelace to a young girl who is guest in his own house. In another a French visitor to England relates, with a frankness which must certainly charm English girls who have extended their usual welcome to French visitors, the strange thoughts which came to him when a young lady played tennis with him, walked with him, talked to him, and in other respects behaved as any English girl would. And then M. Bourget is an "analyst,"—Heaven help him!—a lowest depth from which it may be Aphrodite herself, recognising a good though erring servant, has saved the author of *Boule de Suif*. In the preface to one of his books M. Bourget describes how he and Mr. Henry James held stupendous and

terrible converse in the "hospitable *Athenæum*."

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For analysis (to give it its own word) is perhaps even a worse spirit than naturalism. I make these remarks certainly in no hostile spirit to M. Bourget, for whose talents I have a great respect, and to whom I am indebted for exceedingly amiable notice of certain work of mine. But the analytic method seems to me to stand to the photographic method in the relationship of something that is almost always bad to something that is sometimes good. There are times and seasons, as I have admitted above, when M. Zola's system produces, for a brief space at any rate, work that could hardly be surpassed in merit by any other method. It is rather in his indiscriminate (or, as some would say, his very discriminating) choice of subjects, and in his stinting himself of other and far better methods, that the naturalist goes wrong. The analyst, as he is understood by the American, French, and to some extent Russian schools, who derive at farther or nearer stages from Balzac and Stendhal, is in this

worse off than the naturalist pure and simple, that instead of mistaking a partial for a universal method, he takes for a ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} complète method what is not strictly a method at all. The painful copying of an actual scene or action sometimes results in something that is at least an integral part of a story. The elaborate dissection of motives and characters can only result in something that stops short of being even part of a story—that is only preliminary to part of a story. To illustrate the comparison forcibly if grotesquely, the naturalist is as one who is supposed to supply a complete meal and offers nothing but dry bread. The analyst offers mere dough—something which, valuable and indispensable as a stage in a process of manufacturing the eatable, is not yet eatable at all. It is fair to M. Bourget to say that he himself has never been guilty of the utter futility of some of his American contemporaries (*not* of Mr. Henry James). It is difficult for a Frenchman to rise to the modern conception that a tale ought to tell nothing.

Few words must suffice for the group of tale-tellers of whom I have mentioned the three chief. They are sometimes very naughty, but I own to a weakness for them. For Rabelaisian fun M. Armand Silvestre has scarcely had a superior since the master himself; though (without that master's excuse and apparently out of pure relish for the thing) he is often simply nasty. At these

times he makes me ill. If he would only, now
 that he has laid down his Parnassian
 THE FRENCH NOVEL. trumpet (and a very nice trumpet,
 too, it was), take in hand some

other instrument than that which plays such
 an important part in the choruses of *M. de
 Pourceaugnac*! But, Molière's infatuation for it,
 if sufficiently unintelligible to an Englishman,
 had excuses which are not open to M. Silvestre.
 The pleasant lady who calls herself "Gyp" is a
 little monotonous in her perpetual handling of the
 "triangle," but at any rate she is never unladylike,
 and nearly always amusing. Also she has one
 grand distinction—she has invented in her Eve a
 type, or rather an individuality, which is of the
 rarest in French novels—the young girl, who is
 neither a model of innocence on the way to
 become something not at all innocent, nor a
 Hoyden, nor a Pydia Languish. That she may
 have been imagined not least as a foil to the frail
 dames around her, is quite conceivable, but that
 hardly detracts from her excellence. Moreover,
 "Gyp" is of the right race and lineage of the
conteurs who have made France famous. She is
 not for the wise ones, for the grave or the precise
 ones, but she is for those who can laugh, not
 foolishly—and little there is nowadays in the
 literature of any nation which is for such. The
 allegorically and poetically named viscount is, I
 think, on the whole inferior to M. Silvestre and
 Madame de Martel. His later books are certainly

inferior both to them and to himself; but Le Capitaine Parabère and his brother plungers are excellent company for the ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} most part, when the reader is not a serious person and does not want serious persons for his companions. They are a merry family, these children of the *Vie Parisienne* and of M. Droz, though they are, perhaps, never quite so good as their father was in the days of old.

In the great company of novels and novelists which is present to the memory, there are not a few books and not a few authors (independent of the minor naturalists, of whom presently) deserving of some mention. There is a whole group of Provençal novelists, of whom M. Noel Blache is one of the best, and who have given to the southern provinces something of the same prominence in recent French novel-writing that Brittany used to enjoy in the heyday of the Romantic movement. Indeed, most provincial districts have their groups of painters in words, one of the most remarkable of whom is the author of a singularly powerful series (*Le Forestier, Le Marinier, Le Berger*), dealing with the districts north and south, but especially south, of the seaward course of the Loire. The author, M. Jukš de Glouvet, as his pseudonym went, has since obtained a not wholly happy notoriety in his profession of lawyer. The warmest admirers of M. Viard may exclaim at me for putting "Pierre Loti" only in this category. Certainly *Le Mariage*

de Loti is a very charming, though an extremely affected book of its kind; and there are passages in *Aziyadé*, *Le Spahi*, *Mon Frère Yves*, *Pêcheur d'Islande*, which display great cleverness. But I have myself far too little affection for "preciousness," either in French or English, to care very greatly for a style which, though very closely connected with some styles now popular with us, seems to me to fail in all the best qualities of prose—simplicity, sanity, proportion, and, in the proper sense, grace. Attention has been recently drawn in England to the charming fiction and the urbane criticism of M. Anatole France, whose chief novel is *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*. M. France, like a majority of the best writers of the day, is an old Parnassian (they were very nearly *Quatre-vingt Rimewrs*, as M. de Banville altered it, in the three brave galleys of '66, '69, and '76, but few there are that abide by the oar now), and his prose shows the old practice in its style, as well as a faculty quite independent of such practice in the matter. I, at least, also think that the best work of a much better-known poet, M. Coppée, is in prose fiction. M. Jean Ricard made his appearance some years ago, with a lurid but very powerful little story entitled *Pitchoun!* (the southern for "little one"); his later work has not quite fulfilled its promise. In France, as in England, considerable attempts have been made to resuscitate the Dumasian romance—a

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praiseworthy attempt which has not hitherto been crowned with any very great success.

Perhaps M. Paul Mahalin (of whose THE FRENCH NOVEL. cheerfully-named *Hôtellerie Sanglante*

it cannot be said that the title, like the Honourable Mrs. Boldero, "*prommy pas payy*") is the chief of them. Of the eminent M. Fortuné du Boisgobey, in whom, to a not inconsiderable English body of clients, French novelists appear to be summed up, I desire to speak with all respect. Novels which devote themselves to the elaborate detection of crime appear to have a singular fascination for some people—me they remind unpleasantly of a newspaper; but that is a mere personal matter, and has nothing to do with criticism, which has only to pronounce the now veteran author very good of his kind. But to go through the various novels and novelists of whom and which memory, direct or refreshed, reminds me would be a long and, I fear, to readers a tedious process. Let me only mention among books some years old, M. Henry Cochin's singularly original and delicate story of a strange case of mental aberration (the belief of an old Professor that time is going backward), and among these which are younger, M. Pierre Giffard's remarkably strong and, despite its resemblance to the *Roman Comique*, fresh *Tournée du Père Thomas*, a book not for school-girls. If I do not put on a level with these M. Leon de Tinseau's very pleasant *L'Attelage de la Marquise*, it is because M.

de Tinseau has unluckily gone on writing things
by no means equal to his first attempt.

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M. Ferdinand Fabre's stories of French clerical life have their fervent admirers; M. Georges Duruy and M. Henry Rabusson follow M. Feuillet, with great talent if not with great charm; and of a far older writer, M. Catulle Mendès, another Parnassian, all one can say is, that Providence has given him a quite extraordinary faculty of writing and grace of imagination. "Instead of which," to use once more the famous old joke, "he goes about" writing things which in England would be promptly seized by the police, and which, even in France, must have some difficulties with that body. I need hardly go further; though I have missed a few noteworthy writers and a great multitude of what the private lingo of the critic, who very likely would do no better, but who has at least the resolution to do no worse, calls circulating library novelists, often commendable, often interesting, but seldom extraordinarily good.

"I don't call this very popular pie," said the disdainful (but even in its disdain, democratic) voice of the little boy whom Mr. Grant White met in an obscure New York eating-house, and who thus expressed his disapproval of the sample of the national viand placed before him. To this scion of democracy "popular" meant "good." It does not mean the same to me; and I am bound to admit that in the literal sense M. Ohnet, M.

Zola, M. Daudet, and others do furnish "popular pie" to the novel-readers of France.

But I can by no means admit that ^{THE FRENCH NOVEL.} it is pie as good as has been furnished by any generation (taking a literary generation at some twenty years) since about 1820, or a little later, when the example of Scott stirred up French novelists to try fiction on a somewhat larger scale and with a somewhat wider appeal than the tales and novelettes which had satisfied France from the disappearance of *Le-sage*. It is the peculiarity of novels more than of any other literary kind, that they are usually produced, when they are good, in schools; and of no country is this so true as of France. We generally think of the Romantic novel as exemplified only, and it would be quite a sufficient "only," by the great names of, Dumas, Balzac, Bernard, Mérimée. But round these great ones many minor writers were grouped, and such books as—to take one style only—Féval's *Fée des Grèves* and Achard's *Belle-Rose* were as good as all but the best of Alexandre. To my taste at any rate the hills have sunk in level notably since those days, while the plains have hardly risen, and I can see at least part of the reason. A Frenchman, unlike an Englishman or a German, rarely does good work except in a school, and the only school of much strength nowadays is the school of M. Zola. I have said something of the chief, I may now say something of the followers. Except M.

de Maupassant (who is a free lance, and whom I have sometimes suspected of playing tricks on his master), they are but a feeble folk. M. Zola was right, indeed, in protesting in a rather Johnsonian manner against the rebuke administered to him by some rebellious pupils the other day. They certainly did not carry much weight either for eminence in the school or for eminence in letters. But of the orthodox Zolaists, who is there of whom any sane criticism can say, having read him, anything that is good? The same suspicion of farce indeed attaches to some of them which, as I have said, attaches in my mind to M. Guy de Maupassant. When they expatiate (with ample documents) on the immense relief which a person who is suffering from dysentery experiences in returning from casual quarters to his own chambers, when they parody the famous scene in *Pot-Bouille* by elaborately describing the birth of a calf (both these instances are textual and comparatively harmless), it is really difficult to think that they are not, in more senses than one, M. Zola's merry men. Sometimes (the greatest *farceur* of all of them, M. J. K. Huysmans, is the best instance) they have something of their master's vigour; but none of them has anything of his occasional grasp of actual character, and all exaggerate the absurd pessimism which is the characteristic of such philosophy as he professes. Whether this world is the best of all possible worlds is a

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complicated, religious, and philosophical question. No doubt it has in it toothache, gout, bad wine, bad weather, bad ^{THE FRENCH} poets, puffery, political charlatans, ^{NOVEL.} American cheese, advanced thinkers, spelling reformers, and many other evil beasts and evil things. But it is certainly not such a bad world as the Zolaists, with a monotonous and unimaginative unanimity, make out. I have hinted before that the objection to the new French morality or immorality is not so much that it is immoral, as that it is utterly unamusing and unpleasant. "Loveless, joyless, unendeared," are three words which Milton might have written after reading any novel of the school, except one or two of M. de Maupassant's, when he forgets that he is a naturalist and remembers that he is a man of genius. I remember one book in particular (it is unnecessary to mention it by name, especially as the unlucky author has, I believe, since been shot in a press duel, the most irrational and unheroic, as practised in France, of all encounters, even in the eyes of men who rather believe in duelling). It gave an account of the life of a French schoolboy. He was a dirty, immoral, and dull little schoolboy; but the most dreadful thing about him was his entire failure to get any pleasure out of his misbehaviour. The word for the book and the boy both was *assommant*, which, if I recollect aright, was what the poor little wretch found Scott to be. "Almost

thou persuadest me to be a Christian," said a famous character, whether ironically or not the learned dispute. Those of us who do not require persuasion may, on this point at least, if we have some charity, recognise this one virtue in the latest school of French novel. It must surely not almost but altogether persuade any reasonable reader that whatever royal road there may be to happiness, the rejection of conventional religion, conventional morals, and conventional propriety is not that road.

To sum up, then, the French novel does not appear to be in any more healthy condition than the English ; indeed, it may be said to be in a much less healthy condition. Taking it all round, the superiority of workmanship, of which it has been usually said that they order these things better in France, has for a long time been gradually disappearing in all branches of literature, and in none so much as novel-writing. As a literary cause of inferiority, I do not think that any deserves to be ranked higher than the opposite of that cause which, according to some good people, has weakened our own novel—the absence of consideration for the young person. Doubtless it is not good to write always in the fear of Mr. Podsnap, but it is a great deal worse to live in a perennial state of saying, "Who's afraid of Mr. Podsnap?" "Be virtuous, and have done with it," said Mr. Carlyle, with not altogether unjustifiable

temper, to the sentiment-praters of the eighteenth century. "Be vicious and have done with it" is what I feel inclined to say to the praters of the other thing in the nineteenth. It may perhaps appear to some people that I harp too much on this string; they would not think so if they had read, say, a couple of hundred French novels every year for the last decade. A hunger and thirst after Mrs. Trimmer, an unholy affection for Hannah More, are the natural results of a long course of reading about plain and fancy adultery, diversified only by a few far from brilliant excursions in the manner of M. Belot and M. Bonnetain. The horrible conventionality of invariably falling in love with some one else than one's husband, the intolerable infringement of the rights of man, which says, "Thou shalt not love thine own wife," might surely have been perceived by such devotees of liberty (in print) as the descendants of the men of '89.

I should not, however, be indisposed to see something of a political explanation in the matter, which, it need hardly be said, is only part of a larger matter, to wit, the steady descent of French genius ever since the final overthrow of the old monarchy in 1830. For sixty years, as nearly as may be, it has been more and more difficult for any Frenchman of genius and feeling to take an interest in the political institutions of his country; and much debated as the connection of politics

and literature is, it is simply an historical fact
that almost all periods of great
THE FRENCH NOVEL. literary development have been periods
of great national prosperity or of
brilliant national struggle. The age of Pericles,
the age of Elizabeth, the age of Augustus, the
age of the great Spanish poets, the age of Louis
Quatorze, the age of that great English fight
against anarchy and tyranny combined which
some affect to regret, have been the chief literary
ages of the world. Now in France, since 1830,
every Government of every form has been more
inglorious in the beginning and more unfortunate
in the end than that before it. For a moment it
seemed as if the great disaster of 1870 might
bring about something better, but it notoriously
has done nothing but plunge the nation deeper
than ever in government by mediocrities and dis-
honesties. The movement of 1830 itself was
notoriously an attempt to do without politics in
literature altogether, and to this was probably due
its short-lived character.

I never knew in history any example of a
people who appear to have lost that art of enjoy-
ment which is really the art of life, so much as the
French, judged by their literature and their politics
both. At the present day the common French
remark, "Have we laughed?" has been set down
by some humorists as a proof that to be amused
is a rare and strange thing among the people.
That is a joke or an over-refinement; but certainly

the nation, for all its cafés and its theatres, its exhibitions and its popular fêtes, is both in itself and in its current literature, for the most part, a profoundly dismal one. Of its old beliefs, the belief that it is being betrayed by everybody survives almost alone, coupled with a certain belief in money-making. It does not take its politics, or its pleasures, or its literature with the slightest relish; and there is no truer copybook maxim than that what you do not do with a relish you do not do well.

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II

• ANTHONY HAMILTON

THERE are one or two persons in literary history who have the curious distinction of being known to quite different classes of readers through different works or sets of works, and Anthony Hamilton is one of them. Sometimes the author of the *Mémoires de Grammont* seems to have quite overshadowed the author of the *Quatre Facardins* and its companion tales; sometimes the reverse is the case. In England, as is natural, the tales have been for the most part eclipsed by the memoirs; in France the contrary, though less universally, has happened. Dealing in the main with an English subject, edited sumptuously in the last century by Horace Walpole, with a famous gallery of illustrations, a favourite study and source of quotation with many English authors of the first rank, the Grammont memoirs have all the advantages that are not purely literary; and, for a time at any rate (perhaps only for a time), these

usually outweigh the advantages that are purely literary. The best way is, as in all such cases, to like both, and to ANTHONY HAMILTON. like the author in all his aspects.

He is a very interesting person looked at from the historical side of literature, no doubt; but he is altogether charming by himself, and without any historical considerations whatsoever. He would have been equally charming, except that he would certainly not have written so well, if he had written after Voltaire instead of before him, if the *Bélier* had been the offspring instead of the father of the *Taureau Blanc*. Four nations share the credit of him. Scotland boasts itself on his extraction, Ireland on his birth, England on his education and nationality, France on his language and literary training. There is something of the best of all four in him, though undoubtedly the French and Irish elements predominate.

The details of Hamilton's life have not been preserved in any great abundance, and, if they had been, it would be unnecessary to recount them here at length. He was certainly a cadet of the Abercorn branch of the house of Hamilton, but his exact parentage is differently stated, owing, apparently, to some confusion of titles in the French accounts, and of proper names in the English. He seems to have been in reality the third son of Sir George Hamilton, who was the fourth son of James, first Earl of Abercorn. He was born in Ireland (Voltaire, with whom nobody

else agrees, says at Caen) in or about the year 1646. His family is said to have taken refuge in France after the death of Charles I.—more probably after the Irish successes of Cromwell—and Anthony lived there until the Restoration. A year or two afterwards the Chevalier de Grammont made his appearance at the English Court, and after various flirtations, bestowed his rather compromising attentions on Hamilton's sister Elizabeth. Every one knows the story of Grammont's sudden disappearance from London, of his being caught up at Dover by the brothers, Anthony and George, with the polite question, "Chevalier, n'avez-vous rien oublié à Londres?" and of the obliging answer which was at once returned, "Pardonnez-moi, Messieurs, j'ai oublié d'épouser mademoiselle votre sœur." It is perhaps needless to say that Hamilton himself does not tell the story. But though it does not look like the beginning of a prosperous marriage, appearances were deceptive. Miss Hamilton, if her brother's description and the extant portraits may be trusted, was extremely pretty; and though the ladies of the French Court did not like her, she was a favourite with the men, and apparently retained, as far as they were retainable, the affections of her remarkable husband. Anthony Hamilton often visited his sister and the brother-in-law, whose historiographer he became; but during Charles the Second's reign and James

the Second's (during the latter he enjoyed some preferment in Ireland) England was his headquarters. The Revolution established him finally in France, where he formed part of the melancholy Court of St. Germain. After a time the Duchesse du Maine impressed him for the wit combats of her famous miniature court at Sceaux (the "Court of Seals," as an English wiseacre once translated it). In his later days he became devout, in accordance with the general tendencies of his family. His sister had already, with great difficulty, succeeded in superinducing a very peculiar sort of piety over her husband's very mundane temperament. According to a not too trustworthy tradition, which reposes on the very doubtful authority of the younger Cr  billon, this estimable quality of the Hamilton family had disastrous results for literature. Manuscripts, containing in especial the conclusion of the *Quatre Facardins*, were, it is said, destroyed by the author's niece as immoral, and contrary to religion. Hamilton himself died an old man on the 6th August 1720. Like his sister, he was not wholly popular in France. The French had made up their minds that a witty person ought to be *gai*, and Hamilton had the peculiarly English habit of saying the most humorous and sometimes the most cutting things with a perfectly grave countenance. There is nothing surprising in this; it is rather surprising that, considering how fully this peculiarity is

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reflected in his works, those works themselves should have been so popular in France

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as they have been and still are.

But the perfection of the language, in which the severest critics have found no trace of solecism, doubtless propitiated readers, although Hamilton's English manners provoked a jealousy in personal intercourse.

His works, which, as usual at the time, were known in manuscript for some time before they were printed, and which (also as usual at the time) are in some cases unfinished, are not very bulky, but at least as far as the prose is concerned, there is no alloy in them. First come the *Mémoires de Grammont*, which were published at Cologne in 1713, some years after Grammont's death. Then (taking Renouard's edition) come the tales *Fleur d'Épine*, *Le Bélier*, *Les Quatre Facardins*, *Zénéïde*, and *L'Enchanteur Faustus*. The first three appeared in 1730, the others later; and unpublished poems and fragments continued to be added in different editions during the eighteenth century. These with some letters fill a third volume, to which in some copies is added a completion by the Duke de Lévis of the unfinished tales of *Les Quatre Facardins* and *Zénéïde*. The whole fills (omitting the Lévis part) some twelve or thirteen hundred smallish octavo pages, a respectable but not alarmingly ponderous literary baggage.

Of this work I have already hinted that the

most considerable single example and the most generally popular is not, in my opinion, by any means the best. The *Mémoires de Grammont* form a remarkable document for English history and for social history. The book generally is agreeable reading to those who like personal scandal about distinguished persons, and some of its stories, such as those of the Chevalier's Turin escapades, and the history of George Hamilton's bootless journey to Bretby in quest of the Countess of Chesterfield, are intrinsically amusing. The hero was no doubt a typical personage; and though, except wit and good manners, it is difficult to discern what merits he had, he must have had some to acquire something like the devotion of two such men as Saint-Evremond and Anthony Hamilton. But inveterate though modern prejudices find it difficult to excuse his cheating at cards. The end of the book, too, goes off into details of intrigues such as the Temple-Hobart business, which are extremely complicated, and in which it is difficult to feel much interest. In fact, the historical importance of the volume, frivolous as it is in appearance, is altogether superior to its literary merit. If Hamilton, an Irishman, a Roman Catholic, and a fervent Jacobite, had not shown us what a scoundrel Richard Talbot was, we might have accepted the ingenious contention of some Irish historians that he was a maligned and virtuous patriot. No one

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historical passage enables us so thoroughly to understand the Dorimants and the Vainloves of Restoration comedy as the famous scene in which the Duke of York's favourites undertook at a suggestion to swear away Anne Hyde's character—and their own. But, quite contrary to Hamilton's general habit, the matter of the book is far superior to the manner. The author allows himself hardly any of that play of delicate verbal humour which irradiates every page of the *Contes*. It is not even certain that the words in which he refers to Grammont's youthful military exploits, "Les récits qu'il en a si souvent faits n'ont rien diminué de leur éclat," have the zest of ironic insinuation which would pretty certainly attach to them if they occurred in *Fleur d'Épine* or the *Facaradins*. Hero-worship of the unheroic is proverbially damping to the genius, and Hamilton never seems to have worked himself into the really sublime mood of ethical paradox in which Saint-Evremond contemplated persons like Grammont and Mademoiselle de Kéroualle. It would be agreeable if we could take the whole of the *Mémoires* as an ultra-Swiftian piece of Swiftian satire, in which case they would make one of the capital books of literature; but to affect to find anything of the sort in them would be to avow a faculty for mare's-nesting. From beginning to end there is hardly one of the sudden flashes—sparing but necessary—which reveal an ironic

intention of this kind. Indeed, the tradition which will have it that much if not most of the book was composed at Grammont's own dictation, is not only intrinsically worthy of credence, but will account for many of its peculiarities, and for the absence from it of Hamilton's best qualities. That it is an amusing book need not be said, but may be shown to anybody who does not know it by a translation of the story of the great card-sharpping party. Grammont and his faithful Achates, Matta (a rather mysterious personage, who is said to have been related to Brantôme, and deserves the relationship, inasmuch as he is one of the pleasantest figures in the book), have exhausted their resources in lavish entertaining, and the question is how to raise the wind. The Chevalier, who has already discovered how to gain and retain the favours of fortune, treats the question very seriously, Matta with an unseemly levity—

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"Joking," said the Chevalier, "would be suitable if you had the least idea what to do. Moreover, one had need be really witty to poke fun at everything, as you try to do. The deuce is in it! You will still be joking without remembering that the state of the case is serious. Listen. I am going to-morrow to headquarters. I shall dine with the Comte de Caméran, and I will ask him to supper."

"Where?" said Matta.

"Here," answered the Chevalier.

"You must be mad, my poor friend. This is one of your Lyons projects [Grammont had been piteously rooked

there by a Swiss horse-dealer]. We have neither money nor credit. You know it; and to set matters

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"O man of costive brain!" said the Chevalier. "Is it possible that after we have foregathered so long not a touch of imagination has come to you? The Comte de Caméran plays at quinze; so do I. We want money; he has plenty of it. I will order an excellent supper; he shall pay for it. Call your maître d'hôtel to speak to me, and don't trouble yourself about anything except certain precautions which it is good to take in such a case."

"How?" quoth Matta.

"In this way," said the Chevalier, "for I see that one must explain the very clearest things to you. You command the foot-guards here, don't you? At nightfall you will make Sergeant La Place take fifteen or twenty men, fully armed, and station them, lying down, between here and headquarters."

"What!" cried Matta, "an ambuscade? I really think—God forgive me!—that you are proposing to rob this unlucky Savoyard. If you mean that I am not with you."

"Poor creature!" said the Chevalier. "The truth is as follows. We shall probably win his money; and the Piedmontese, though excellent fellows, are somewhat suspicious and mistrustful. He commands the cavalry. You know that you can never hold your tongue, and you are capable of letting fly some awkward joke to tease him. Suppose he were to imagine that he is being cheated, and be annoyed at it, who knows what may happen? For he generally has a dozen troopers at his heels. Therefore it is good to take some means to put ourselves in the right, however angry he may be at his losses."

"Embrace me, dear Chevalier!" cried Matta, holding his own sides with laughter. "Embrace me; you are too admirable! I thought, like a fool as I was, when you spoke of taking precautions, that there was nothing to do but arrange a table and some cards, or perhaps to provide

some false dice. I never should have thought of ordering up a detachment of infantry as supports to a man who was playing quinze. You are ANTHONY
HAMILTON. certainly a great soldier already."

The plan is carried out, the dupe falls into the snare, Grammont deliberately cheats, and Matta, not altogether liking what is going on, drinks deeply in order to send himself to sleep.

At first they only staked three or four pistoles, as if for a joke; but Caméran, having lost three or four times, staked higher, and the game became serious. He lost again, and became noisy; the cards were thrown about the room, and the noise waked Matta. His head being dizzy with sleep and hot with wine, he began to laugh at the excitement of the Piedmontese, and instead of consoling him—

"Faith, my poor Count," said he, "if I were in your place I would play no more!"

"Why?" said the other.

"I don't know," said Matta; "but I feel that your bad luck won't change."

"We will see," said Caméran, and he called for fresh cards.

"See away," said Matta, and went to sleep again; but not for long. Every pack was equally unlucky for the loser; he got nothing but the marked cards, and finally he even showed fifteen. It did him no good. Thereupon he cried out again.

"Did I not tell you so?" said Matta, waking up with a start. "It is no good getting in a rage—you will lose as long as you play. Believe me, the shortest follies are the best. Leave off, for may the devil fly away with me if it is possible for you to win."

"Why?" said Caméran, who began to lose his temper.

"You want to know?" said Matta. "Faith! because we are cheating you."

Then said the Chevalier de Grammont, shocked at a

joke which was all the more out of place that it looked like truth, "Do you think, M. Matta, that it is very amusing for a man who is playing with such bad luck as M. le Comte to have your dull jokes dinned into his ears? For my part, they bore me so that I would throw up the cards this moment if he had not lost so much."

Nothing piques a man more than such a hint as this. So Caméran, regaining his temper, told Grammont to let M. Matta talk if he did not mind; for his own part, it did not annoy him at all. Then the Chevalier treated him much more politely than the Swiss at Lyons had treated himself, for he played on credit as much as he liked. Caméran was so much obliged to him for this that he lost fifteen hundred pistoles, and paid them the next day. As for Matta, he received a good scolding for his incontinence of tongue. But the Chevalier got no satisfaction out of him, except that he could not find it in his conscience to let the poor Savoyard be cheated without warning. "Besides which," said he, "it would have been great fun to see a set-to between my infantry and Caméran's troopers in case their master had cut up rusty."

Such was the heroism of Saint-Evremond's hero ("Héros" and "Philosophe" were their names for each other), and it may be admitted that it has some qualities of the heroic. The story shows him at his best, for it is admitted by his panegyrists that he was much less fortunate in love than at play, despite his adoption of the same amiable methods of assisting and correcting fortune by intercepting letters and suborning servants. • •

*In the *Contes* an entirely new and on the whole a much more satisfactory development of Hamilton's genius begins. Their original dates are in all cases very uncertain, though *Le Bélier*

and *Zénéide* contain some chronological indications, and *L'Enchanteur Faustus*, by a reference to an Irish Lord ANTHONY HAMILTON. High Admiral of Elizabeth as the "trisaïeul de madame votre mère," shows itself to have been written very late in Hamilton's life. They are, as printed in the edition which I follow, five in number, though some of the miscellaneous works to be noticed presently class themselves with them. From the mere point of view of literary history they are sufficiently interesting. They are in artificial literature the principal result of the mania for fairy tales of one kind and another which Perrault, from the side of indigenous folklore, and Galland from that of translation of oriental originals, made fashionable at the end of the seventeenth century in France. For details of the less-known practitioners of this late and not least charming growth of coterie literature, I must refer readers to M. Honoré Bonhomme's *Cabinet des Fées*, for the subject, though tempting, is much too large to be dealt with here. Another side issue may be indicated by mentioning that the tradition of Lesage having collaborated in Galland's translation (a tradition for which I know no solid foundation) may possibly by some ingenious inquirer be connected with the fact that Lesage undoubtedly dramatised the subject of Hamilton's "Last Night" *Fleur d'Épine* in *La Princesse de Carizme*, though the treatment is wholly independent. Hamilton

himself is enough for us here. Of the five tales, only the three first require detailed notice. *L'Enchanteur Faustus*, which has been imitated in English, is a lively legend of the calling up of ancient beauties before Queen Elizabeth and her comments on them. But it is short and of no extraordinary merit. Hamilton's ignorance of history, or his indifference to it, could hardly be better illustrated than by the audacious complacency with which he makes Jane Shore, instead of Eleanor of Guienne, the murderous rival of Fair Rosamond. After this, the establishment of Essex and Sidney as contemporary favourites of Elizabeth hardly deserves mention. *Zénéïde* has a very sprightly setting, some parts of which are as good as anything that Hamilton has done; but the actual story, excepting the episode of Albion, is a *conte à dormir debout* made up of Merovingian legends and Roman history. It probably has (as all the tales are said to have) a satirical reference to personages of the time, but is intrinsically devoid of even the slightest interest. It is, moreover, unfinished, or rather, it is hardly begun. Supposed to be told by a nymph of the Seine, its real attraction lies in the characteristic badinage with her and her attendant maidens, and in the very remarkable introduction which, as giving probably the best picture in existence of the court of St. Germain, must be here translated—

You ask me, madame, for a long letter and some Court news: you shall have both. I will not talk to you of the situation of the palace, for you know it. But with all its magnificence it is the least suitable to us of any palace in the kingdom. For the château is so poorly provided with room that not more than thirty or forty priests and Jesuits have apartments there. A single chapel and two oratories in the building, the parish church and a few convents just outside, these are the only exercising places for our piety. This is but a makeshift, and in a summer's day the whole business with its etceteras is done before sunset. No doubt the view is enchanting, the walks marvellous, and the air so fine that we could eat four meals a day. That is two more than we ought to have, and we should be much better in some marshy site where our senses and appetites might be dulled by the constant environment of a thick fog. But do not think that our life as it is, is intolerably lively. That is not my meaning; and you will see it when I tell you the life we lead.

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Although the most fastidious taste might content itself with our ladies, and though, scant as is their number, beauty, pleasant manners, wit, and good sense are brilliantly represented among them, as much cannot be said of the other sex. We have had some difficulty to furnish gentlemen of merit enough to make up the household of the Prince of Wales; the rest of us are men whom example has not been able to make hypocrites—men rather given to despise others; but themselves much despised here, and perhaps not so well known as elsewhere.

We appear to be given up entirely to serious occupations and Christian exercises, for there is no room here for any one who does not spend half the day in prayers, or at least seem to do so.

The community of misfortune, which ordinarily serves as a bond of union between those who suffer from it, appears to have shed among us discord and ill-temper; friendship, of which great show is made, is often feigned; hatred and envy, though concealed, are sincere, and while in public we

put up prayers for our neighbour, we pull him to pieces at our leisure in private.

ANTHONY Sincere affection, surely the most excusable of
HAMILTON. weaknesses, is held here as the least innocent.

As for gallantry, it reigns among us as in the days of Amadis ; it breaks out constantly in some surprising adventure, or else we begin by marrying, and then fall in love and flirt quite at our leisure. . . .

How melancholy is the use that we are reduced to make of the consolations which fortune offers to make us endure our exile ! A day or two ago I had been thinking on this till my spirit was filled with many sombre vapours, and to get rid of them I had recourse to the gardens. It was a holiday, and by bad luck the vulgar had occupied every path with muddy dogs, dirty children, and husbands uglier than their wives. I gave place to the ignoble crowd and sought refuge on the terrace. You know there is nothing in the world grander or more spacious than this great promenade ; but that day there was no room for me and my annoys. First of all I found a Jesuit, a famous proselytiser, between two Englishmen, a grenadier and a dragoon. Both of them were deserters, but, as it seemed, much more faithful to Calvin than to the Prince of Orange, for the good father was evidently exciting himself for nothing with the most fervent protestations. In vain did he try to prove to them in Italian that all English Protestants must be damned. I perceived that he made no impression : that some money would be needed to finish the conversion. A little further I saw a most excellent man, who is also a wit ; but I was very careful to avoid him, for not to mention that he is a great arguer on ancient and modern politics, he always has with him two large greyhounds, who, as soon as they see a man, come at full speed and put their paws on his shoulders out of pure politeness. May God receive the soul of his Grace the late Archbishop of Paris ! He took up the half of the terrace with his coach and eight. I got off with a deep bow, which the good prelate did not see, so deeply was he meditating his duty to the King at the assembly of the clergy. I was beginning to praise heaven for the

apparent freedom of the rest of the walk, when I saw coming suddenly out of the wood the most savage and inevitable beast that I know—it is a widow, ANTHONY HAMILTON. whose husband died of apoplexy in the King's service, and who in a long black serge train sweeps the corridors and the walks from morn to eve to ask for a pension, or to find some one who knows some one who is known by some lady who is good enough to admit acquaintance with the reigning favourite, so as to obtain her good offices. I remembered the trouble I had had to get rid of her one day when she hooked herself on to me; and as she was coming straight towards me, I took the only course left in this imminent peril. Choosing the lowest place I rushed down the slope of the terrace, and making my way downwards by a narrow and difficult path, I never looked round till I found myself out of range and in the midst of the beautiful meadows which border the Seine.

That this is a passage "for thoughts" will hardly be denied, but as the thoughts are tolerably obvious there is no need to undertake the impertinent task of thinking them for the reader.

The three longer tales rank higher, not merely because of their length. They are certainly the happiest examples extant of the application of the fairy story to purposes of social and literary satire. If any indignant Voltairian protests, it can only be said that, admirable as Voltaire's tales are, they are certainly to no small extent modelled on Hamilton, and that, in the second place, despite their abundance of wit, they are too much subordinated to a special purpose, and do not display anything like the same facility in pure narrative as their models. The careless ease with which Hamilton makes the most complicated threads of

apparently independent stories combine to weave the warp and woof of one central plot, is hardly to be matched elsewhere, while in Voltaire the narrative is for the most part a mere vehicle which passengers enter and alight from without any regard to a concerted and coherent story. It is true that the most remarkable instance of Hamilton's skill in this way, *Les Quatre Facardins*, is, owing either to indolence or (if Crébillon's story is to be believed) to mere accident, unfinished. But its affairs are left in perfect order, and the web is quite free from fault up to the point where the loom stopped. Very much of the side purpose of these stories indeed escapes us, and it is doubtful whether even the industry of the late M. Fournier could have forged a complete key to such intricate wards. But this hardly at all interrupts or diminishes the pleasure of the reader, which is maintained by the narrative skill already mentioned, by the constant flow of urbane sarcasm requiring no special and parochial interpretation, and above all by the extraordinary ease and grace of the style. This of course vanishes in translations, and cannot be fully relished without an acquaintance with what came before it, just as the form which Hamilton chose is not wholly intelligible without some knowledge of the fairy-tale literature, the heroic romances, and those other productions of the immediately preceding time which he half imitated and half satirised. But in this as

in other matters Hamilton's claim to distinction is that, while the historic estimate distinctly increases the enjoyment of him (as ANTHONY HAMILTON. it does the enjoyment of all good literature) it is by no means necessary to that enjoyment.

No argument of either of the three is possible in a small space. They are so crowded with incidents, the incidents, according to the system above hinted at, are so inseparable from the main action; and the loop lines of digression (all of which contribute again to the main trunk) are so numerous, that anything like a sufficient argument of either would be not very much shorter than the tale itself. In *Fleur d'Épines* the literally, not metaphorically, murderous eyes of the Princess Luisante are deprived of their destructive power by the courage and address of a certain disguised Prince, yclept Tarare, whose chief task is to rescue the beautiful Fleur d'Épine from the clutches of a sorceress. In *Le Bélier* (which was written to please a fancy of Madame de Grammont, and which is full of disguised local and personal allusions) the giant Moulineau in vain besieges a learned Druid and his lovely daughter Alie, by the very untrustworthy help of a talking ram, who is really an enchanted prince, the lover of Alie. *Les Quatre Façardins*, the most ambitious, and to my thinking the best, describes the adventures of four personages, each of whom bears the name of Façardin, and who for various causes have to dree weirds of a more or less intricate and

surprising nature. The intricacy of the narrative in this last is remarkable. Here also chiefly if not solely appears that license of allusion and description, which, with Hamilton's followers, became one of the main features of tales of this kind. It must be an extraordinarily prudish critic who finds anything alarming to his or even her modesty in *Fleur d'Épine* or *Le Bélier*, at any rate with a little goodwill. In *Les Quatre Facardins* there is no harm meant, and very little done. Yet a grave, precise reader, not gifted with very acute faculty of divination, would probably, on arriving at the adventures of the amiable but too curious Cristal-line, shut the book with very much the same face which Mrs. Newcome assumed when she reached a certain passage in *Joseph Andrews*. But Hamilton, although he wrote fairy tales, never pretended to write for children.

There are some people (of whom I do not in the least blush to avow myself one) who rejoice with exceeding joy in fairy stories merely as such. We see so many people about the streets who are as stupid as any giant without being giants at all, that we rejoice to meet a giant in print, even if he is stupid. We see so many damsels who are by no means enchantingly beautiful or attractive, whatever may be the excellence of their morals, that we can quite pardon an excess of amiability over strict propriety in these delightful damsels of romance. The knives that write of themselves

like Planchette, but which, unlike that machine, write very valuable intelligence and not stupid stuff, please us. The

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successful and heroic adventurer is a distinct comfort after one's own adventures, which are frequently unheroic and too often unsuccessful. All the interesting impossibilities of fiction have something of a positively cheering character as challenges to the absolutely uninteresting possibilities of life. Of course the stories must be good. Hamilton's are admirably good. They must not be too long; a long story of the kind should be written in verse. But the longest of Hamilton's does not exceed a hundred and fifty pages, very roomily printed. If, however, they were merely well-told fairy stories, they would hardly hold the place accorded to them in this paper. Their special and peculiar charm, independent of their narrative merit, to some extent also independent of (though closely connected with) their admirable style, is the perpetual undercurrent of satirical criticism of life—the special function of light narrative prose—which they cover and occasionally display. Not even the *Diable Boiteux* is fuller of such touches, while, though Lesage had a wider range and a firmer touch than Hamilton, his expression is hardly possessed of the same exquisite urbanity. Hamilton never draws attention to his satire, never prepares his readers for it by any chuckle of his own, never goes back on it or emphasises

it unduly, or lets it pass from a smile into a grin.

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"Le calife lui en donna sa parole :
et le sénéchal, qui aimait à travailler,
lui en expédia des lettres patentes."

"Sa taille [it is a prince who speaks] était la plus noble et la plus aisée qu'on pût voir et son visage était si charmant que son secrétaire même, accoutumé à le voir tous les jours, ne put s'empêcher de témoigner sa surprise et son admiration."

"Il y a des esprits indolents et spéculatifs qui passeroient des heures entières sans parler, principalement quand ils sont seuls : mais pour moi qui n'ai jamais su ce que c'étoit que cette ridicule oisiveté d'imagination qui fait rêver à tous les objets qui se présentent en voyageant sans ouvrir la bouche pour en raisonner, je me parlais à moi-même quand je n'avais personne à qui parler."

Hamilton's blows are always of this kind, mere scratches, as it were, but still scratches like that famous one which happened to his own Facardin of the Mountain, and going "from the right ear to the left heel" of the person or class at whom they are delivered. Yet he is by no means a mere cynic. His flashes of good sense, of chivalrous spirit, are hardly less numerous, and not at all less perfectly phrased, than his satiric touches, the charm of which they decidedly heighten.

Two details as to the *Contes* are worth giving.

The first is that *Fleur d'Épine* and *Les Quatre Facardins* connect themselves by their machinery avowedly with the *Arabian Nights*. The second is that *Le Bélier*

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is written alternately in verse and in prose. This mixture, the origin of which may be perhaps sought in Petronius, was not an original importation of Hamilton's into French, for there were famous examples before him. But his execution attracted immense applause, and not a little of his other work is couched in the same form, a form which (beyond doubt directly from him) commended itself to Voltaire and others. The success of it was without doubt due to the untranslatable word and not quite translatable thing *engouement*, of fashionable fancy, which, as we know from no small authority, was the characteristic of French society from Louis XIV to Louis XVI. In comparison with the appreciation due to Hamilton's talent for uninterrupted prose narration the approbation which it excites in modern critics can hardly be other than lukewarm. The whole scheme is artificial in the extreme, and the quality of the verse portions is not calculated to appeal very forcibly to any one who has a distinct idea of the differences between poetry and prose. It is very clever: the "*rimes redoublées*," as one of Hamilton's critics says, "are singularly seductive." But it is like all French poetry, with the rarest exceptions, from Théophile de Viaud to André Chenier, merely the most

exquisite prose cut into lengths and tipped with rhymes. It may, however, be frankly admitted that contemporaries did not so judge it. Hamilton's most famous

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exploit in it is the "Épître au Comte de Grammont," which is usually printed before the *Mémoires*, but which really preceded the composition or at least the publication of that book by several years. This excited an extraordinary enthusiasm. Chapelle, who had a kind of seignioralty over the style, Dangeau, and others rewarded the author with congratulatory replies, and Boileau himself, shaking off the morose disdainfulness of which at the time (1705) even his natural inclination to flatter a man of rank but rarely got the better, wrote to Hamilton a letter of mixed prose and verse, in which a really genuine admiration for the foreigner's admirable French is discoverable. It is not surprising that such a reception encouraged Hamilton to produce more work of the kind. Most of his extant letters to Berwick (with whom he was very intimate) are in the same style, and there are numerous epistles to other persons, sometimes written in his own name, sometimes obligingly lent to other people. They are all interesting, they all have his almost unfailing characteristics of urbanity and wit, and they contain many particulars, less striking indeed than the introduction to *Zénéyde*, but still attractive enough, about the ways and manners of the miniature Courts of St. Germain and Sceaux.

But as literature, they seem to me inferior to those of the minor works, which are frankly prose or frankly verse. As ANTHONY HAMILTON. a poet, Hamilton suffers a good deal from the limitations already described. His unfinished, and indeed scarcely begun, verse tale of *The Pyramid and the Gold Horse*, written for Miss O'Brien, of the Inchiquin O'Briens, is infinitely inferior to the prose *Contes*. An attempted translation of Pope's essay on criticism is not much better, though it has been undervalued in France. But the minor poems rank very much higher. They are for the most part purely occasional, and of the kind which severe persons may if they please term frivolous—bouquets, chansons, impromptus, and what not. But with the exception of Voltaire's verses to Ulrica of Prussia (which I take to be the *ne plus ultra* of verse that is not poetry), there is hardly anything in French with which they may not compare favourably, and every now and then a far higher and really poetical vein asserts itself. Oddly enough, it is particularly noticeable in the few but charming rondeaux which Hamilton has left. One of these, and the beautiful chanson "Celle qu'adore mon cœur n'est ni brune ni blonde" must be given, for they are Hamilton's title-deeds to the name of poet.

RONDEAU REDOUBLÉ

Par grand' bonté cheminoient autrefois
Preux chevaliers couverts en fine armure,
Ores par monts, ores parmi les bois,
Redressant torts, et défaisant injure,
Trouvoient par cas horions, meurtrissure ;
Par cas aussi sur fringants palefrois,
Dames près d'eux, friandes d'aventure,
Par grand' bonté cheminoient autrefois.
Toujours mettoient amour dessous leurs lois,
Jeunes beautés de bénigne nature ;
Et voyoit-on bien reçus chez les rois
Preux chevaliers, couverts de fine armure.
Mëshui s'en vont, mis en déconfiture,
Soulas, déduits : et la gent à pavois
Plus ne s'ébat à coucher sur la dure,
Ores par monts, ores parmi les bois.
Princesse, en qui le ciel met à la fois
Esprit sans fin, et grâces sans mesure,
Vous seule allez du vieux temps aux abois
Redressant torts et défaisant injure
Par grand' bonté.

SONG

Celle qu'adore mon cœur n'est ni brune ni blonde ;
Pour la peindre d'un seul trait,
C'est le plus charmant objet
Du monde.
•Cependant de ses beautés le compte est bien facile :
On lui voit cinq cents appas,
Et cinq cents qu'on ne voit pas
Font mille.
Sa sagesse et son esprit sont d'une main céleste ;
Mille attraits m'ont informé
Que les Grâces ont formé
Le reste.

Du vif éclat de son teint quelles couleurs sont dignes !
 Flore a bien moins de fraîcheur,
 Et sa gorge a la blancheur
 Des cygnes.

Elle a la taille et les bras de Vénus elle-même ;
 D'Hébé la bouche et le nez ;
 Et, par ses yeux, devinez
 Qui j'aime.

Of this last charming piece my friend Mr. Austin Dobson, our sole heir and single of the poets of the early eighteenth century, has given an admirable translation—

She that I love is neither brown nor fair ;
 And in a word her worth to say,
 There is no one that with her may
 Compare.

Yet of her charms the count is clear, I ween ;
 There are five hundred things we see,
 And then five hundred more, there be
 Not seen.

Her wit, her wisdom are direct from Heaven ;
 And many a tender touch explains
 How with the Graces what remains
 Has thriven.

Her cheeks' fine hue what painter's brush would note ?
 Beside her Flora would be wan,
 And white as whiteness of the swan
 Her throat.

Her supple waist, her arms, from Venus claim ;
 Kebe her nose and mouth confess ;
 And by her eyes alone you guess
 Her name.

The miscellaneous works in pure prose are few but of very considerable value. They are four in number. There is a dialogue, *La Volupté*, which obviously follows on the track of Saint-Evremond, but which is hardly a complete success, for abstract subjects were not Hamilton's forte. There is a *Relation d'un Voyage en Mauritanie*, a coterie satire on the courtiers of the Duchesse du Maine, to which Lord Houghton, no mean judge, has given high representative rank, and which deserves that rank. There is a *Relation d'une Partie de Chasse*, which, by the way, is not purely prose, and should properly perhaps be classed with the epistles, except that it is an obvious satire upon them. For Hamilton had eminently that faculty of self-ridicule which a Frenchman rarely attains, and which M. Taine, while very properly accepting it as a note of humour, regards at the same time as something barbarous or semi-barbarous. But the *Relations Véritables de Différents Endroits d'Europe*, of which this *Partie de Chasse* is a kind of supplement, are most admirable fooling. Written, as they were while newspapers were yet young, the satire is perfectly just and true even at the present day, and it is doubtful whether any one except Thackeray has ever done anything quite so good of its class. They are all devoted to the household of Berwick, of which, as has been said, Hamilton was an intimate. It is not easy to wind up the extracts

here given better than by a cento from this little piece—

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ST. GERMAIN-EN-LAYE, NOVEMBER

On the 10th of this month Madame la Maréchale de Berwick took her leave of the Court, accompanied by a numerous suite of gentlemen and ladies and by pouring rain, which continued to escort her to Le Bourget. Here M. le Maréchal, her husband, joined the company as they sat down to table. This contributed in no small degree to the enjoyment of the magnificent repast, besides, serving to calm the anxiety of Madame la Maréchale after so long a separation.

CHANTILLY

To-day, the 11th of November, the cortège of M. and Madame de Berwick having been descried on the heights of Versine, between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning, a courier was despatched from this place to pay them respects and offer them refreshments. As M. le Maréchal was not present, my lady his spouse replied, and in answer to the respects offered, observed to the courier that it was the finest day in the world, an observation which was indorsed by all the illustrious personages who were in the coach.

FITZ-JAMES

The *Court Journal* informs us that Brigadier Lord Nugent, quartered at St. Omer on the service of his Majesty the most Christian King, presented himself, as Madame le Maréchal was getting out of her carriage, with the Baron de Favier and many noblemen and gentlemen of the vicinity.

The next day (12th inst.) his lordship had several interviews with his Excellency Field Marshal the Duke of Berwick on the subject of the last campaign in Flanders, where the minister, according to his custom, was pleased to praise greatly the conduct and skill of the generals.

After dinner on the same day he accompanied the ladies in a superb cavalcade which they made ANTHONY across the vast forest that extends at some HAMILTON. distance from the palace of Fitz-James. His lordship being mounted on one of the most powerful horses to be found in the stables of his excellency, this contributed not a little to the admiration which the inhabitants of the country manifested for his imposing stature.

The ladies mounted, on spirited and fleet coursers, because of the ferocious beasts, charmed or rather dazzled by their beauty seven or eight hundred hunters armed with guns, who pursued the wild denizens of the surrounding woods. It was considered sufficient to slay two wolves only as an example to the others.

What frivolity ! some grave and precise persons may exclaim, just as it is recorded that other grave persons in France have complained that Hamilton's *Contes* are *remplis d'extravagances*, a charge which it is as impossible to deny as it is not to laugh at it. Perhaps there is always something frivolous in satire, unless it thunders and lightens after the fashion of Juvenal. The wise man of the Stoics would not, it is certain, have written solemn parodies of our friend the Court newsman ; he would have proved to him that he was unworthily employed, and have recommended him to study the works of Epictetus. But Hamilton was not a wise man of the Stoics, he was a wise man of the Epicureans. As such, like other wise men of the same party, he by no means failed to show evidences of what Stoics and

Epicureans alike consider noble qualities. Little is known of his military services, except that he was wounded and reaped little glory at the rout of Newtown

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Butler, but his reputation was untarnished in a time when any failure to do the duty of a soldier was fatal. Therefore it is difficult, considering his extreme familiarity with Berwick and the fact that he was still in the vigour of life at the Revolution, to explain his abstinence after that date from military service on any other grounds than an honourable unwillingness to serve against his country's flag, and under that of his country's enemy. Thoroughly French as is his tongue, his heart was evidently English. His choicest compliments are reserved for English beauties, and none of the customary sneers against England are to be found in his work. He bore his exile without repining (for the harmless outbreak about the extreme clericalism of St. Germain's cannot be called by that name), and yet it is evident that it was not a matter of indifference to him. Even the tenor of his actual work argues a considerable independence of spirit. At a time when his great contemporary, La Bruyère, wrote *les grands sujets sont défendus*, he set the example of at least satirising abuses if he did not protest against them. Some of the sharpest strokes of the *Contes* are directed against absolute monarchs and the dangers of absolute monarchy. It was at the most despotic time of Louis XIV's reign

that Hamilton drew the caliph in *Fleur d'Épine*, who, finding the foolishhest man in his dominions, "n'avait eu garde de manquer de faire son premier ministre d'une tête comme celle-là," who "ne savait que la sienne [language] et même assez vulgairement," who, instead of shutting his daughter up, "faisait faire et processions et prières publiques pour qu'il plût au ciel de regarder en pitié son pauvre peuple ou d'empêcher que sa fille ne le regardât." Fifty years later these things would have been a mere commonplace, familiar to every scribbler. They were not so in days when Boileau and Bossuet led the choirs of flatterers, and when exile or imprisonment awaited the independent. Although the reputation of freethinking, which Voltaire has by innuendo attributed to Hamilton, rests upon no solid foundation, he conspicuously refused to be a hypocrite at a time when the two Courts of St. Germain and Marly vied with each other in "encouraging hypocrisy. None of the monkey tricks of his brother-in-law, either at play or in love, are charged against him, and the worst that has been said of him is that he had a sharp tongue, which (for our benefit) is fortunately true. In short, if it were necessary merely to bring witnesses to character and in extenuation a very fair case might be made out for Hamilton.

But it is not necessary. It is not necessary even, though it is not impertinent, to point out that to Hamilton, an exile, shut out from active

employments and exposed to the danger of sinking to the level of the *tracasseries* and pettinesses of a mock court, what ANTHONY HAMILTON. has been called the humour-gate of escape was almost the only one open. His work is so excellent in itself, it was so powerful as example and as precept, it summarised and anticipated with such surprising exactitude the literary and social ideals of four generations in French society, that it needs no palliation from such arguments as these. They may add to or vary its interest, but they are by no means required as set-offs and excuses. Chamfort called the *Mémoires de Grammont* the "Bréviaire de la jeune noblesse," and it is said that the too famous Duc de Richelieu deliberately modelled himself on Hamilton's and Saint-Evremond's hero. Over this, as a consequence, the moralist and the social historian must, of course, wag in cadence their sympathetic heads. But it would be absurd to regard Hamilton as a tempter and seducer of youth. A foreigner of no wealth, of no extraordinary rank, and holding no prominent position in Church or State, does not create a fashion. The most that can be said of him is that with remarkable social observation, and consummate literary skill, he seized the type of the French noblesse after the failure of the Fronde had made independent political action impossible to it, and the influences of the coteries had a little softened the ferocity of its manners, and enshrined that type in a memorable book. This would have

been a great achievement of itself, but it was not by any means Hamilton's only one. He also hit, and it may be said determined, the tone of polite literature in France for a century. He was, no doubt, indebted to Saint-Evremond in prose, and to Voiture, Chapelle, and others in verse, but he altered the tone of the one and improved the expression of the others. Saint-Evremond has all the seriousness of the seventeenth century when he deals with serious subjects: Hamilton sets the fashion which, in dealing with these same serious subjects, the eighteenth century followed. It might not, except for verse and prose "of society," have followed it but for Voltaire, but the influence of Hamilton himself on Voltaire is altogether beyond dispute. It is in these gossiping memoirs, these idle tales, these occasional and impromptu madrigals and copies of verses that the note was struck, the chord touched which continued to echo and vibrate till it died with Andrieux and Xavier de Maistre, within easy memory of living man.

But, after all, the chief pleasure to be found in Hamilton is, as was said at the beginning, purely intrinsic. The reader who knows and cares nothing about his personal character and fortunes, nothing about his literary influence, nothing about the far-ranging, social, and historical importance of his types and standards of manners and of morals, of thought and of style, cannot miss it, unless he indeed be one of the unlucky foxes who have lost

their tails, who more probably were born Manx foxes, and who, possessing no sense of humour themselves, cannot understand what enjoyment the possession or the manifestation of it can give to others. The wonderful clearness of his style, its brilliancy, its easy flow, and the rapid evanescent ebullitions of wit and satire and humour which break through it from time to time, may be compared by a conceit not out of keeping with the time and subject to those mineral springs where the white water, as it slips over rock and through green borders of grass and weed, is suddenly broken from time to time by little explosions of air, which catch the ear almost more readily than the eye. Nothing can be less boisterous than Hamilton's merriment. Sometimes that merriment is very sharply edged. No doubt many people besides Chaulieu agreed in the sentiment which that easy-going Abbé expressed in some of not the worst of his own verses—

ANTHONY
HAMILTON.

Mais très-bien nous serions passés
Des brocards qu'avec la fleurette
Votre Muse, en fine coquette,
Tout doucement nous a glissés.

though it is doubtful whether they would all have added, like Chaulieu, that they were

Bien loin d'en être courroucés.

But whether he is rallying general or particular follies, the steel is always polished, the glissade

always equally dexterous, the motions of this

"fine coquette de muse" equally grace-

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HAMILTON.

ful and rhythmic. Though there is

license there is never *polissonnerie*, as

there is in too many of his followers. Though

there is evil-speaking, both of dignities and others,

it is the most agreeable evil-speaking, the most

elegant scandal in the world. There are people,

as every one knows, who will give tens of thousands

of pounds to fit a boudoir with furniture and

pictures, the chief interest of which is that they

help to recall the long dead life, the long perished

activity and circumstances of the fine gentleman

and fine lady period of the days of Louis and of

Anne. To any one who knows how to taste and

to view literature, Hamilton's works, at a consider-

ably cheaper rate and with much less trouble,

give the finest flavour, colour, and form of that

chapter of the past.

III

ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE

A CRITIC of whom I desire to speak with all respect—the late Rector of Lincoln—said that “mere style cannot confer ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} immortality upon any book apart from its contents.” The context from which this remark is taken deals with the *Provinciales* and *Pensées* of Pascal, concerning which Mr. Pattison thought that the former are but an ephemeral pamphlet, the latter are for all time. So startling a judgment makes the reader a little inclined to dogmatise hyperbolically in his turn, and to say that there is nothing perennial but style. This, indeed, would be merely running from one extreme to another; nevertheless, there is more truth in it than in the other exaggeration. For the attitude of men’s minds changes singularly, from one time to another, with regard to mere “contents”; it changes very little with regard to the expression of those contents. This is, perhaps, nowhere seen more clearly than in the case of

very voluminous authors whose works are preserved in unequal remembrance. When such cases are examined, it will generally be found that the reason for the preference which posterity has expressed has been almost entirely due to literary merit. Between the merit of the contents of Defoe's different novels there is not very much to choose; yet no one who speaks with competence will question that the literary art of *Robinson Crusoe* is, on the whole, far superior to that of *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*. So, in the not wholly dissimilar case of our present author, the contents of *Estévanille Gonzales* and *The Bachelor of Salamanca* are not much less interesting, if they are less interesting at all, than those of *Le Diable Boiteux* and *Gil Blas*, while *Guzman d'Alfarache* has perhaps a positive advantage over much of the latter. But Lesage was never so well inspired from the literary point of view as in the two works which have been justly deemed his masterpieces, and in this lies the justice of the selection.

The reasons of the inequality of Lesage's work, are to be sought in the same cause which, in all probability, accounts for such inequality in most cases. Where men never write below themselves, it will almost invariably be found that their work has either been thrown off in the heyday of youth, or, if spread over a long course of years, has been written for pleasure merely—at any rate, without any immediate pressure of want. Pegasus, as one

of the greatest of English writers in our time has put it, must, in the unhappier cases, be too frequently spurred, and will not <sup>ALAIN RENÉ
LESAGE.</sup> always answer to the spur. Now the long life of the author of *Gil Blas* was anything but one of ease. He had few patrons, and was not of a temper to have many. Literature, unfortunately, was stick, crutch and all to him, and he was unlucky in his law affairs, a fact which probably accounts for the continual satire he pours on law and lawyers. Yet, by birth, at any rate, he belonged to the profession. His father, Claude Lesage, was at once Advocate, Notary and *Greffier* (Registrar) of the Royal Court of the small district of Rhuys, the out-of-the-way peninsula which bounds the Morbihan on its eastern side. Alain René was born on the 8th of May 1668 (his mother being by name Jeanne Brenugat) at Sarzeau, the chief town of the district, which, it may be well to remind readers, was also the locality of the Abbey of St. Gildas de Rhuys, the very uneasy refuge of Abelard after his calamities. It is not a little characteristic of the peculiar bent of Lesage's genius, that it shows hardly any local colour, though Brittany has, of all French provinces, left most mark on her children as a rule, and though Lesage's birth-place lay in perhaps the most striking part of the Duchy. But Lesage left his native province young; he never, so far as I know, returned to it, and he very probably had unpleasant associations

connected therewith. The father's triple office was profitable enough, but he died when his son was young, and the property he left him was dissipated or embezzled by a dishonest guardian, a personage of frequent occurrence in those days, and one whom Lesage smites again and again in his novels. That the boy was at school at Vannes, the neighbouring episcopal city, until 1686, is known; but this is almost all that is known about his youth, and then he disappears for some eight years. It has been supposed that he may have held some small post in the financial department of the province, or that he may have continued his studies at Paris, the latter being by far the more probable hypothesis. Anyhow, in 1692, he was admitted as an advocate at the Bar of Paris. But he apparently got no clients, and when he was six-and-twenty he took to himself a wife, Marie Elisabeth Huyard. She is said to have been remarkably beautiful, and they lived for many years together, it would seem, happily enough; but she had no fortune; she was only a tradesman's daughter, and his marriage can hardly have added to the young lawyer's resources. Falling in with an old schoolfellow, Danchet, who had already made some mark in literature, he was recommended by him to seek the same refuge for the destitute. His *coup d'essai*, a translation of the letters of Aristænetus, which appeared in 1695 (he had been married in August or September

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1694), has made his biographers and critics rather merry. He certainly might have done better, but it is doubtful whether the oddity of the choice—comparatively worthless as the book is—struck that age as it strikes ours. The indiscriminate reign of the classics, early and late, good and bad, genuine and spurious, was not yet over, and many a young man of letters had ‘made his *début* with work not intrinsically better. Lesage, however, had no luck—he had not much at any period during his life—and the book fell flat. A more useful adviser in every sense, however, fell to his lot in the person of the Abbé de Lyonne. Lyonne not merely gave him, or procured him, a pension or annuity of six hundred livres—no despicable assistance to modest housekeeping at that time, when living at Paris was extraordinarily cheap—but recommended him to study Spanish literature, of which he himself was a great lover. Three-quarters of a century before, this literature had been greatly admired and largely borrowed from in France, but the age of the great writers of Louis the Thirteenth’s time and his son’s had put it out of fashion. Lesage began by simple translation or adaptation, and, as in the case of Aristænetus, he was not too fortunate in his models. In drama, at least, he did not go far wrong, choosing Rojas, Lope de Vega, and Calderon for his originals, and producing plays which were sometimes acted. But a version of the

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worthless *New Don Quixote* of Avellaneda was, sorry work for the future author of *Gil Blas*. The play which he conveyed from Calderon—*Don César Ursin*—had some merit; and in 1707, being then hard upon his fortieth year, he scored two great successes. His little piece of *Crispin Rival de son Maître* appeared, and was loudly and deservedly applauded, while the *Diable Boiteux* obtained still greater favour. It ran through several editions in the year, and many legends of the usual character are told about its success. The most characteristic, and probably the truest, is that Boileau found his footboy with a copy, and declared that if such a book stayed a night in his house the boy should not stay another. Lesage was already hailed as a Molière Redivivus, and this of itself was sufficient to irritate Boileau in his sour old age. But it would probably have been sufficient for that vigorous but narrow critic that the book was not in any style which he had himself recommended, or which he could understand. For Boileau was the incarnation of the merely French spirit of literature in its most contracted form; Lesage, as we shall see, was not specially or primarily French at all except in his wit, the very quality which the author of the *Namur Ode* was least qualified to appreciate. Lesage, however, had not yet arrived at his apogee. Despite his theatrical successes he was never on very good terms with the players of the regular theatre, and

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a small piece—*Les Etrennes*—was refused by them at the beginning of 1708. The author took it back, set to work on it, ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} and refashioned it into *Turcaret*, the best French comedy, beyond all doubt, of the eighteenth century, and probably the best of its kind to be found outside the covers of Molière's works. It is in connection with *Turcaret*—the success of which was very great, though the powerful class offended by it did not conceal their displeasure—that one of the few personal and characteristic anecdotes we possess of Lesage is told. He had been asked to read his play to a fashionable company at the Duchess of Bouillon's, and, being delayed by law business, was late. The Duchess—let it be remembered that it was some half-century before all Paris interested itself in the quarrel of two "miserable scribblers who live in garrets"—rebuked him with some asperity for keeping her an hour waiting. "Eh bien, Madame," replied the poet; "je vous ai fait perdre une heure, je vais vous en faire gagner deux;" and he put his manuscript in his pocket, and, resisting all entreaties, went away. The anecdote rests on the authority of Collé, who, in such a case, is fairly trustworthy, and it probably explains why Lesage's life was one of struggle. Though his independence was, most likely, natural and usual, it is said to have been made more touchy on this particular occasion by the fact that he had lost the case which had detained him.

However this may be, his dissatisfaction with the *Maison de Molière* soon assumed a still more active form, and for five-and-twenty years the best living comic dramatist of France gained his bread chiefly by writing for the stage of the *Foire*, the irregular but licensed booths set up during fair time. Lesage is said to have written no less than twenty-four farce-operettas, as they may perhaps best be termed, for these boards, and the total number which he wrote for them as whole or part author is sometimes put at sixty-four and sometimes at a hundred and one. It was about the time that he took to this occupation (in which he was kept in countenance by not a few writers of talent, if not of genius, notably by Piron) that *Gil Blas* appeared in 1715. This, his greatest work, was scarcely so popular as *Le Diable Boiteux*, and it was long before it was finished, while the number of editions during the thirty years of the author's life was by comparison surprisingly small. Among the few positive statements that we have about Lesage's literary gains is one to the effect that a hundred pistoles had been advanced to him as prepayment for the last volume several years before it was completed. It does not of course follow that this was the whole price. The two first parts, as has been said, appeared in 1715, the third in 1724, the fourth in 1735. Thus Lesage evidently took time about his greatest work, though he was compelled to do much else in a hurry.

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His productions were sufficiently miscellaneous, though most of them had to do with the vein of literary ore which had been ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} so fortunately indicated to him. A version of *Guzman d'Alfarache*, much altered and improved; *l'Histoire d'Estévanille Gonzales*; and *Le Bachelier de Salamanque*, were the chief of these, while he also translated the *Orlando Innamorato*. A curious collection of imaginary letters, called the *Valise Trouvée*, and some minor works, came from his pen; besides which he was at the close of his life occupied on a collection of anecdotes which appeared after his death. He also superintended a collection of his *Théâtre de la Foire*, as he had previously one of his regular pieces. One work not yet mentioned, the *Life and Adventures of M. de Beauchêne, Captain of Flibustiers*, brings him curiously near to Defoe, especially as in this, not less than in the English case, a groundwork of actual memoirs is said or supposed to have existed. From his children Lesage had both trouble and profit. The eldest was bred a lawyer, but became an actor and was disowned by his father. The second took orders, obtained a canonry at Boulogne, and became the mainstay of the family. Worn out by seventy years of life and thirty or forty of literary work, Lesage about 1740 retired, with his wife and daughter to the city where his son lived, and spent there his remaining years, dying on the 17th of November 1747. A very curious and

interesting letter from the Count de Tressan is in existence, giving an account of him in his very last days. Tressan is known to all students of French literature as having laboriously dressed the stories of the *Chansons de Gestes* in eighteenth-century garments for the readers of the *Bibliothèque des Romans*—to which act we owe Wieland's *Oberon*—and as having, in ignorance of the existence of the original, bravely extemporised a *Chanson de Roland*, which stands, perhaps, in more absurd contrast to the true *Chanson* than any other conjectural restoration does to any other original. But he had a real interest in literature, and seems to have been amiable enough at this time. He was a military officer of high standing in the days of Fontenoy, and after that battle was for some time at Boulogne, where he used to visit Lesage. "The old man (he was then about seventy-seven) was," says Tressan, "in a state of half torpor till midday, but he then revived, and was fairly in possession of his faculties till sundown"—a fact from which the philosophic Count makes some large inferences in proper eighteenth-century style. But, even when most wide awake, Lesage was very deaf, and nothing would induce him to put his trumpet to his ear when persons he disliked were his interlocutors, though it went up readily enough when any one he liked approached. This is the last of the very few pieces of personal gossip which we have about him,

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and it proves satisfactorily that a hard worker and a great benefactor of his species, who had not in his time enjoyed too many ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE. of the gifts of fortune, at any rate passed his last years in peace and in such comfort as might be. His wife outlived him but a very short time, and died at the age of eighty.

If an author is to be judged only by those works whose popularity has stood the test of time, Lesage need only be considered as the author of *Crispin Rival de son Maître*, of *Turcaret*, of *Le Diable Boiteux*, and of *Gil Blas de Santillane*. His other prose works are, indeed, of considerable bulk, but they are for the most part distinguished by the merits of the more celebrated pieces in a less prominent, and by the faults in a more prominent, degree. His *Guzman d'Alfarache* is chiefly interesting as a specimen of *remaniement*, a process which has been more often applied in modern times to dramatic work than to prose fiction, and which, perhaps, in the case of prose fiction, has never been so well managed as here. *M. de Beauchêne* has, as has been already mentioned, some interesting points of resemblance to the methods of Defoe. *Le Bachelier de Salamanque* has a certain interest, because of its connection with the theory or hypothesis of a lost Spanish original of *Gil Blas*. If Lesage himself may be trusted, there was certainly such an original in the case of the *Bachelor*, and one of the many suppositions tending to deprive him of

the credit of his greatest work supposes that both were extracted or rehandled from the same work. *Estévanille Gonzales* is, perhaps, the least attractive of all, while it is also one of the least original, and the translations from the Italian, etc., need not delay us. Among the minor works the chief are: first, a lively and well-written little dialogue, called *Une Journée des Parques*, which has had the luck to be oftener reprinted than most of Lesage's *opuscules*; secondly, the already-mentioned collection of imaginary letters called *La Valise Trouvée*; and, lastly, the collection of anecdotes which was the author's last work and which was not published until after his death. Of Lesage, however, it is truer than of most writers, that he is best seen in his best work. His pot-boilers usually have something of his easy style and much of his pleasant subacid wit, but they fail, as a rule, to show the power of truthful character-drawing which was his greatest merit, and their wit itself degenerates into mere smartness more frequently than could be wished.

Somewhat more notice must be given to his work for the *Théâtre de la Foire*, not merely because it has considerable intrinsic merit, but because of its volume, of the constant labour spent on it for full a quarter of a century by the author, and last, but not least, because of its curious form. The pieces which were played at the fairs of Paris were very popular, and their

popularity was the subject of constant jealousy on the part of the regular actors of the *Théâtre Français*, though the other two ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} branches of the legitimate drama, the opera and the *Comédie Italienne*, were sometimes more or less in allié with their little sister. Not a few of Lesage's pieces deal directly with the vicissitudes of *la Foire*. The plays represented on these boards were a curious mixture of the *commedia dell' arte* and the old French farce. Harlequin in particular is an almost invariable character, though the full complement of Pierrot, Scaramouche, Colombine, etc., only occasionally appears. The plays were of three kinds. One of these was drama reduced to nearly its simplest terms. There was no speaking on the stage and the actors confined themselves to pantomime in dumbshow, while two little cherubs sat up aloft with a long roller of wood, from which, from time to time, they unrolled placards on which short songs, set to popular airs, were inscribed. These songs were sung by the audience, assisted by the actors and orchestra. Here, of course, the author's work was limited to the conception of the action, the expression of it by stage directions to the actors, and the composition of the songs. A second kind of piece was the *Vaudeville* proper, in which the whole play is written in lyrical *couplets*. In the third and most elaborate, ordinary prose dialogue is mixed up with songs. This last sometimes attained considerable dimensions and

was divided into acts. These popular pieces were, throughout the eighteenth century, composed by authors whose literary standing was by no means low—such as Lesage, Piron, Collé, and many others—and when a piece had a particular vogue it was not unfrequently transferred, at the command of some great personage, to the boards of the opera. Our author, as has been said, wrote a very large number of these curious compositions in all the three styles just described. Their literary value is, of course, far from great, but they display a good deal of invention, a command of easy verse, and much less indulgence in the besetting sin of the fair theatre, license of language, than most of their fellows. *La Princesse de Carizme*, one of the longest, and possessing something like a plot, is also one of the best. It rests on the well-known story of a princess whose beauty turns all who behold her mad. But, on the whole, the pieces which deal with the rivalry of the *Foire* and the graver dramatic institutions are, perhaps, the most amusing. The contrasted display of the *Comédie Française*, her solemn tragic airs and the mannerisms of her lighter mood, with the impudent coquettishness of the personified *Foire*, gave Lesage a good opportunity, of which he did not scruple to avail himself. The contrast, of course, is an old one, and something like it had been frequently brought with success on the popular stage, even in early times. *La Querelle*

des Théâtres has something in it which reminds the reader of the old morality of *Science et Amour*. The music of the pieces, too, ALAIN RENÉ
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The two pieces of Lesage which, if they have not actually kept the stage, have at least secured their place in collections of the French drama, demand a longer mention. I say if they have not kept the stage, for I have no positive knowledge as to the question whether *Crispin* and *Turcaret* have of late years been represented. They are certainly amusing enough to read, and *Turcaret* is something more than amusing. *Crispin Rival de son Maître* is a much less ambitious piece than *Turcaret*. It is, in fact, only a longish farce

in one act, but in a great number of scenes.

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Something of what an English critic once very unjustly called the "exaggerated manner of Molière" may be observed in it. Indeed, this phrase of Hazlitt has a good deal of truth when applied to this little piece; it is Molière's manner exaggerated by recourse to the Spanish style of comedy, from which the great playwright had refined and purified his own. There is the usual impecunious and unlucky lover, but the usual valet, instead of backing his master, enters with another valet into a wild plan for marrying the heroine himself. By playing into each other's hands the two rascals succeed for a time in hoodwinking the father, and, by gross flattery, in winning over the mother to their side. The scheme is upset by the simple fact that the father of the suitor whom Crispin personates soon appears, and by the still simpler one that the master, of course, recognises and identifies his servant. But the intrigue, impossible as it is, is very briskly kept up, and the short bustling scenes hardly allow the audience to reflect on the improbability of the thing. The dialogue is full of brilliancy, rather resembling Congreve than Molière, and this, being unquestionably the best of its kind that a Parisian audience had heard for a generation, probably secured the popularity of the piece. *Turcaret* is a much more important production. It has the full five acts of a regular comedy, and, though its

plot is rather loose, the ruin and discomfiture of the financier Turcaret give a sufficient unity to it. The action, too, is well sustained, but the merit of the piece—
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 a merit for which it stands almost alone in the French comedy of the eighteenth century—lies in the striking projection of the characters and the lively natural traits with which they are drawn. The objection which has been made to these characters—that they are rather partial than complete sketches of human nature—applies to all French drama and to almost all artificial comedy, whether French or English. But it would not be easy to find a French play, out of Molière, in which so many figures stand out so strikingly from the canvas, as is the case in *Turcaret*. The financier, ashamed of the lowness of his origin, ruthless to his debtors, and a swindler in his dealings with his associates, but capable of being bubbled of his money in the most open fashion by a great lady who condescends to permit his addresses; his wife, an incarnation of vulgar provincial vice, as desperately jealous of her husband as she is shamelessly unfaithful to him; the chevalier who exploits Turcaret's mistress just as that mistress exploits Turcaret; the baroness, not too scrupulous to plunder her suitor so long as she believes his addresses to be honourable, but generous enough and not wholly corrupted; the reckless marquis, who has at least the advantage over his friend, the chevalier, that

he is not a knave: all these personages, in themselves mere stock characters of the oldest date, are made to live and breathe by touches of Lesage's genius.

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The most often-quoted scene of the play, where Madame Turcaret, introduced to the baroness's salon, gives an account of the diversions of Valognes, where "on lit tout les ouvrages d'esprit qu'on fait à Cherbourg, à St. Lo et à Coutances, qui valent bien les ouvrages de Vire et de Caen," is a masterpiece of its kind, and not much less can be said of the adroit servility of the waiting-maid Lisette. Frontin, her lover, has the defect of all the valets who descend from the Menandrian comedy—the defect of exceeding improbability—but he is not more improbable than Molière's Scapins and Gros. Renés, and, indeed, not so improbable as some of them. It is also noticeable that, though the dialogue of *Turcaret* is as full of witticisms as any reasonable man can desire, it has not the fault which is frequently noticeable in French manner-comedies and almost always in English—the fault of letting mere wit combats occupy the characters to the detriment of the dramatic interest of the play. Everything in *Turcaret* tends duly to its end. There are few things more surprising, and perhaps, it may be added, less satisfactory, in connection with the theory that a subsidised and established theatre tends to encourage the production of works of genius, than the fact of the subsequent disagreement

of the players with Lesage. It is almost inconceivable that the man who wrote such a play should not have had it in him to write 'others of equal, if not greater, goodness. But, as we have seen, Lesage had no opportunity of improving upon *Turcaret* or repeating his success, being almost immediately diverted from the regular theatre to the *Foire*, where, whatever he may have done, he certainly did not work for posterity. His dramatic career, indeed, was that of Molière reversed. The earlier writer began with a long apprenticeship to farce-writing and then turned his attention to regular comedy, the other began with regular comedy and was afterwards driven to farce. When one considers the special opening which drama presents to a man who, like Lesage, prefers to work on the inventions of others rather than to spin everything out of his own brains, his abandonment of it seems much to be regretted. Perhaps, however, on the whole the world has not lost; for where a play gives amusement now and then to hundreds, a novel gives it constantly to thousands, and it is extremely improbable that the very best work that Lesage could ever have produced in the way of drama would have added to the sum of human enjoyment as much as *Gil Blas* has added.

It has already been observed that Lesage's fashion of dealing with his originals when he wrote prose fiction sometimes resembled the usual manner of dramatic authors. If, however, this

latter manner resembled the conduct of the author of *Le Diable Boiteux* in the composition of this work, the charge of plagiarism, which is constantly brought against dramatists, could hardly stand. The *Diablo Boiteux* of Lesage and the *Diablo Cojuelo* of Luis Velez de Guevara stand to each other in a very curious relation. At first the later work looks almost like a translation of the earlier; for two chapters it is a translation and very little more. But suddenly Lesage seems to have felt his own power and strikes off on an entirely new path. Neither the course of the story, nor the conclusion, nor even the great majority of the episodes and detached anecdotes in the *Diablo Boiteux* are derived, even by suggestion, from Guevara, while the simplicity of the French style and the unbroken stream of lively *narquois* narration contrast as strongly as anything can do with the euphuism of Guevara and the singular encomiastic digressions on all sorts of personages which figure so largely in the *Diablo Cojuelo*. The substance of the book is made up partly, no doubt, of anecdotes borrowed from divers Spanish sources, partly of more or less historical gossip about French men and women of the author's own time—Dufresny the comic author, Baron the actor, Ninon de L'Enclos, are usually specified as figuring—partly of inventions of Lesage's own. As most people know, or ought to know, the plot is sufficiently simple. A young student, for

whom an ambush has been laid by his perfidious mistress, escapes by way of the roof, makes his way into a neighbouring garret, which happens to be the laboratory of a magician, and is besought by a voice out of a phial to deliver the speaker from durance by breaking the bottle. The request is complied with, and the imprisoned sprite turns out to be Asmodeus, *Démon de la Luxure*. Here almost all borrowing from Guevara ceases. In the Spanish the new confederates journey to different parts of Spain, and the incidents of the story are mainly supplied by the efforts of envious devils to recapture Asmodeus. In the French the general plan is based on an exertion of the power of Asmodeus, whereby he unroofs the houses of Madrid and exhibits the fortunes of the inmates to the student, Don Cleofas, while an additional human interest is imparted by a fire, in which the good-natured and grateful demon takes the shape of Cleofas in rescuing a young lady of high birth, and thereby secures for his liberator a prosperous marriage. As a connected story, the original, despite its digressions and episodes, perhaps has the advantage, though the ultimate decision on this point must be left to those who, unlike the present writer, can speak with equal authority on Spanish and on French literature. Lesage's pre-eminence must be sought in the scattered traits of wit and knowledge of human nature which he sprinkles liberally over his work, and in the brisk

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and vigorous style wherein the book is written.

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Diabolo Boiteux. Lesage took something

from La Rochefoucauld, something and perhaps more from Saint-Evremond, and, availing himself of the general improvement in French prose style which had resulted from the school-mastering of the academic critics, from Balzac to Boileau, produced a mixture of singular pungency and elegance. Couched as the whole work is in the form of a lengthy dialogue between the demon and Don Cleofas, the author has availed himself of the characteristics of his characters in a sufficiently artful fashion. The petulance of the student never allows the good demon to engage uninterrupted in too long a narration, but constantly recalls him to this or that interesting incident, which makes a digression in the midst of the histories and prevents any feeling of *longueur* from stealing on the reader. Now this is a feeling which the general plan of the French-Spanish *Roman d'Aventures* adopted by Lesage was only too much calculated to produce. The pedigree of stories of this kind was a long one. They arose unquestionably, on the one hand, from the prose Greek romances to which the Byzantine period gave rise, and on the other from the incomparable romances of chivalry, to use the usual though rather indiscriminate term of which France must claim the invention. To do the *Chanson de Geste*, the oldest form of the

latter variety, justice, digression was not among its faults. But from the first the Greek, prose romance seems to have ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} been liable to it, and from the date of the *Romans d'Aventures*, which express in a way the union of the two, it was a crying sin of the western romance, whether it was written in verse or in prose. Everything by degrees became sacrificed to length, and the easiest way of attaining length was by indulging in numerous episodic excursions. Moral disquisitions, personal panegyrics, sentimental discussions on points of amatory law, which the earlier seventeenth century had endured, were impossible at the time when Lesage wrote, and he confined himself solely to the story within a story which his English followers, Smollett and Fielding, adopted from him, and which lasted even to the days of Scott, with the advantage to literature of producing what is, perhaps, the best short tale in any language—Wandering Willie's legend in *Redgauntlet*. By that time, however, the necessity of connecting the digressions definitely and directly with the general story had forced itself on the consideration of the romancer. Lesage's age was less critical, and his episodes might be cut out without damaging such central story as he has, but with a woful consequence to the total interest and attraction of the book. What saves *Le Diable Boiteux* is, let it be once more repeated, the smartness of the satire, the acuteness of the observation of life, and

the pure fluent style in which the whole is embodied. The one means which has always been able to move a French audience or body of readers has been the untranslatable *malice*; and Lesage possessed the secret of this in an eminent degree. But he had more than this—he had also the faculty of informing his malicious side-hits at human nature, with a certain breadth and truth in which Voltaire himself fails except when he is at his very best, and the gift of never going out of his way for a gibe, a mistake too common among French authors. The fantastic setting; the absence of any attempt to get into the pulpit and preach, while a certain subtle under-flavour of moralising reconciled the most moralising of all centuries; the urbanity of the style, and the allusions, artfully scattered here and there, to personal adventures and personal gossip, were quite sufficient to attract contemporaries. That the popularity of the *Diable Boiteux* has been more than ephemeral shows—let us repeat it, for it cannot be too often repeated—that observation of Nature, embalmed with due preparation of art, is never likely to lose its hold upon men; if it were, adieu to literature.

The good qualities of *Turcaret* and the *Diable Boiteux* appeared in far more striking measure and co-ordinated far more skilfully in the great work by which, and perhaps by which only, Lesage is now directly known to the general reader of any country. Of the general merits of

Gil Blas it is necessary to say very little. Nor is it necessary to add in this particular place, anything to what has been said <sup>ALAIN RENÉ
LESAGE.</sup> and will be said of the comparatively half-hearted estimation in which his countrymen have held the writer of this masterpiece. In French histories of literature Lesage holds but a subordinate place, and he is sometimes treated as second in the race to Defoe, though it is hardly necessary to say that the first and best of the great Englishman's romances is younger than *Gil Blas* by nearly five years. Argument and abstract are equally superfluous. How *Gil Blas* left his scarcely unwilling kin, how he learnt by bitter experience not to trust too much to flatterers, how he fell among thieves, among the minions of the law, among actors (on whom Lesage took a terrible vengeance in this book for the treatment they had accorded to him), even those to whom the pleasure of reading the book, in whole or even in part, is yet to come, know, in virtue of a thousand quotations and allusions in every kind of literature. Of the latter parts of the book, which show in the author some such an idea as that by which Dickens, either before or after the fact, excused the transformation of Mr. Pickwick's character, perhaps less is known by those who have not actually read it. Only one episode—the famous and, indeed, immortal relapse of *Gil Blas* into youthfulness in the matter of the Archbishop of

Granada—has passed into general knowledge. I shall only say that it is perhaps the very happiest holding up of a mirror to one particular weak place of human nature that I know. Few people perhaps, save reviewers, who are in continual receipt of expostulations from the reviewed, know how eternal is the verity of the presentment. By some unhappy fortune the particular stanza of the poem, the particular chapter of the novel, the particular juncture of the plot, which the critic happens to blame is the very thing that is best in the book. "On n'a jamais composé de meilleure homélie que celle qui a le malheur de n'avoir pas notre approbation." This is only an illustration of the supreme merit of the book—its absolute truth to Nature. But another illustration may, perhaps, be pardonably given. It has been said, or hinted, that in the last two volumes *Gil Blas* is a much better as well as a much less ridiculous personage than he is in the first—this is especially the case in the last. Prosperity, age, the absence of temptation, account for this. But Lesage's un pitying, because absolutely veracious, talent would not suffer him to turn his intriguing fortune-hunter into a saint. The ugly episode of the journey to Toledo, in which the admired minister Olivarez and the respectable reformed rake *Gil Blas* play such awkward parts, is an instance of the truth which is put in the homely phrase Defoe loved—"What is bred in the bone will not go out of the

flesh." Nowadays, perhaps, when the naturalist school, in its scorn of the namby-pamby, rushes into the opposite extreme and will have nothing but vice and ugliness, such a book as *Gil Blas* is infinitely more instructive, as well as more refreshing to read, than all the rose-pink pictures of impossible virtues and all the half-told tales of life with the dark side of it kept out of sight that literature can muster. It will scarcely be pretended by any brisk young novelist of the nineteenth century that he has more insight than Lesage, scarcely, either, that Lesage was afraid to say what occurred to him or that his literary vocabulary and general equipment were unequal to the task. Yet here is a book as free from cant or from taint of the *hérésie de l'enseignement* as any one can desire, and yet one leaving no bad taste in the mouth, meddling with no abnormal crimes, and suggesting as a total reflection not merely that all's well that ends well, but that in most cases with fair luck all does end fairly well.

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The question of the origin, or, if the word be preferred, of the originality, of *Gil Blas* may not be of much intrinsic importance. But its traditional importance in the history of literature is considerable, and something, perhaps, must be said about it here. The assertions of the more or less complete indebtedness of the author to a Spanish original may be classed under three heads. There is, first, the assertion that *Gil Blas*

is taken from the *Marcos de Obregon* of Vincent Espinel. This was advanced very shortly after the appearance of the book, and currency was given to it by Voltaire, who roundly repeated it, in consequence, beyond all doubt, of the galling attacks which Lesage had made upon his early dramatic and epic efforts, not merely in his farces but in *Gil Blas* itself, where the author of *Zaire* figures as Don Gabriel Triaquero. The second is due to a Spanish Jesuit author, who, avowedly setting before him the object of claiming *Gil Blas* for his own country, endeavours to make out that it is simply a translation of a Spanish original. The third is a more elaborate hypothesis and more difficult of disproof—its foundation, such as it is, has been already alluded to. It is supposed that Lesage extracted the matter, at least, of *Gil Blas*, as well as that of the *Bachelier de Salamanque*, from a manuscript Spanish original which has since disappeared. As to the first charge, it is one of those curiously hazardous ones, the making of which can only be accounted for on the general principle that some of most handfuls of mud, which are thrown is likely to stick, for Espinel's work is unanimously confessed by competent examiners to be not in the least like *Gil Blas* on the whole, though a very few detached traits may have been taken by Lesage from it, as they almost certainly were for others of his prose fictions. The patriotic hypothesis of Father Isla

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suffers only from the fact that there is not the faintest trace of a Spanish *Gil Blas* or of any allusion to such a work. As ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} for the third, it is obviously, and on the face of it, as impossible to disprove as to prove. There may have been French *Macbeths* and *Lears* from which Shakespeare adapted the existing pieces, for aught we know. But, when we dismiss merely hypothetical argument and examine the matter coolly, we find, first, that there is absolutely no external evidence that Lesage did in any way plagiarise *Gil Blas*; secondly, that there is overwhelming internal evidence that, while he made free use of his Spanish predecessors for details, for local colour, and so forth, the essential part of the book is fairly his own. The "picaroon" romance, as it is called, was a specially Spanish variety of *Roman d'Aventures* which, abandoning giants and enchanters on the one hand and the long-winded sentimentalities of the *Amadis* and the Scudéry romances on the other, confined itself to the actual life of the still but half-civilised dominions of the King of Spain, and to the most exciting incidents of that life. Immense numbers of these books were written by Spaniards during the seventeenth century; and with many, if not the majority, of these Lesage was, we know, familiar. Many of the separate incidents of *Gil Blas* have been traced to this literature, and, perhaps, more might be so. But there is no reason to believe

that the general *cadre* into which Lesage fitted these is not his own, and there is every reason to believe that the peculiar spirit with which he informs the whole, and which gives it its peculiar value is absolutely his. The shrewd wit, neither sententious nor solemn, of his isolated sayings is assuredly not Spanish; the peculiar universality of his indications of the weaknesses of human nature is still less so. There is little of the kind, I may venture to say, in the greatest of Spanish writers, in Cervantes himself; there is nothing of the kind—competent authorities vouch for it—in any lesser Spanish writer. To the higher side of Spanish imagination, its poetry, its magnificence, its forgetfulness of the baser sides of life, Lesage has no claim to approach. But in regard to a sort of prosaic infallibility and universality which he has he may as fairly pretend that the Spaniards have nothing of his. If there is little of Don Quixote, there is, perhaps, something of Sancho in some of his characters; but it is only such an agreement as writers starting from the most diverse points might attain.

To one charge which has been brought against *Gil Blas*, that of undue length, it is difficult to offer a very valid defence. That this length conducted to the anachronisms which the author admits in a characteristic and sarcastic *avertissement* is very probable. But these are matters of very little consequence and may be ranked with

the sea-coast of Bohemia and Hector's reference to Aristotle. It is of more importance that the extreme prolongation of the book has made it—as may freely be admitted—to a certain extent tedious. Nor does it seem reasonable to doubt that this prolongation was, in some degree, artificial—that is to say, that the favour with which the book was received and the offers of the publishers, very likely induced the author to extend it a good deal more than he had at first designed. *Per contra* it can only be alleged that, in the peculiar style of which *Gil Blas* is an example, there is no natural limit to the exposition. The book having no defined plot, but being a picture of *quotquot agunt homines* in so far as the life of a particular person touches that action, nothing but the death of the hero can be said to bring it to a close. This, indeed, is of the essence of the romance as opposed to the epic, and, in its so-called regular or non-Shakespearian form, the drama. These two latter presuppose a definite and limited plot. The romance does not, and it admits not only an indefinite extension in a straight line, but also digressions and episodes *ad infinitum*. That this is rather a weakness than a strength of the style may certainly be admitted, and the fact had been sufficiently exemplified, not merely in the mediæval poem-and-prose romances but in the *Amadis* cycle, where the reader is conducted from generation to generation in a manner sufficient to weary

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the patience of the most robust. But it was characteristic of Lesage that he was an innovator rather in detail than in the general. He did not produce the modern novel—that was reserved for his younger contemporary Prévost. He only took an existing *genre*, made many small improvements in it, and produced a masterpiece therein. Perhaps it would be ungrateful to complain, when he did so much, that he did no more.

In the controversies which have arisen about Lesage's greatest work it is not very difficult to find a satisfactory explanation of his great and peculiar value. For the Spanish claim—absolutely unsupported as it is by one tittle of external evidence, and, indeed, as we may almost say, completely as it is rebutted by all such evidence—rests in reality on an expressed or understood idea that no one but a native writer could have so dealt with Spain and Spaniards. The retort to the charge is as instructive as the charge itself. Frenchmen appeal to Germans, Englishmen, and other foreigners to decide the cause, and the referees give their decision in a manner which is decisive. Gil Blas, they say, is not specially a Spaniard, though the art of his creator has dressed him up marvellously in the habits, garments, and speech of Spain. He is simply a man, and the accuracy with which the author has hit the universal beneath the particular would have equally enabled him, had he chosen, to draw an

Englishman or a German, and would have entitled Englishmen or Germans, had they been sufficiently shortsighted, to claim his ^{ALAIN RENÉ} work as borrowed or stolen from an ^{LESAGE.} English or German original. The reply is unanswerable, and the more one reads Lesage the more convinced one is of the sufficiency of it, and the more proof one finds of its truth. It is in this quality of universality, of striking at the essential humanity of men and dealing with their accidental nationality only in such manner as might suit his purpose, that Lesage's great genius consists, and in this quality he is, as it seems to me, at the head of all French writers, and only second to Shakespeare. Of course the range of the two is very different, it is even hardly commensurable. Lesage had his faculty at complete command within certain very restricted limits, but beyond those limits he was not in the least master of it; indeed, it can scarcely be said that he endeavoured to show it at all. Whether his thorough and comparatively early studies in one peculiar and extremely artificial kind of literature the picaresque romances and intrigue-dramas of Spain—narrowed his mind at the same time that they sharpened it, is a question rather of psychology than of literature; but it is certain that he shows very little tendency to wander out of his own narrow circle, and that when he does so he becomes merely an ordinary man of letters, possessed of a pleasant wit and of a ready and skilful pen.

But within his circle he hardly yields to the master himself. Indeed, Gil Blas may hold up his head in any company, even in the company of Shakespeare's

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children. There is the same invariable consistency, the same total absence of false notes, the same completeness of presentation. It is in this latter that Lesage differs most from his countrymen. The fatal doctrine of the ruling passion had made but little impression upon him. In drawing Gil Blas he has not an abstraction of intrigue and courtiership of the lower class before him as a model, he has a man who, for a long time, is given up partly by the unkindness of fortune, partly by natural bent, to courtiership and intrigue. To the last, touches of Nature, though they naturally grow fewer and fewer, chequer and diversify the presentment. Now this was what the French, since they had given themselves up to swallow the doctrines and do the bidding of Horace, as represented or misrepresented by the native critics of the Malherbe-Boileau school, could not attain to, and could hardly even understand. Had Boileau lived a little longer, it may be shrewdly suspected that he would have regarded *Gil Blas* with much more indignation than that with which he regarded *Le Diable Boiteux*, and it is noteworthy that the greater work was far less popular with its author's countrymen than the lesser. They would, doubtless, have liked Achilles to be always *iracundus*

inexorabilis acer, and would have preferred that Gil Blas should have outwitted the parasite in the matter of the trout, and kept the favour of the Archbishop of Granada. *Gil Blas*, too, is far less full than *Le Diable Boiteux* of the epigrammatic *pointes* which have never ceased to delight the true Frenchman—indeed, they are delightful enough—and which reach their climax in the writings of Voltaire. Such sayings as: “Vous n’avez pas des idées justes de notre enfer”—“On nous reconcilia, nous nous embrassames, et depuis ce temps nous sommes ennemis mortels”—“Je sais qu’il y a de bons remèdes, mais je ne sais pas s’il y a de bons médecins”—“Tout payeur est traité comme un mari,” and a hundred things besides, are worthy of the author of *Candide* at his very best, and his countrymen could not fail to relish them. They were less keen to relish such a presentment as that of Gil Blas, and therefore Lesage’s fame, great as it has been even in France, has been more European than French, and he is to be quoted and compared with foreigners rather than with his countrymen.

There is another point of importance in which Lesage has a resemblance to Shakespeare. He has not merely in some not small measure the quality of universality, but he has, and this in very great measure, the quality of detachment. He seems to look at his characters with the same

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inscrutable impartiality as that with which their creator contemplates Iago and Goneril, Macbeth and Claudius. He does not describe their monkey tricks with any particular gusto, at least of a personal kind, nor does he regard them with the least moral indignation. All that does not concern him. Writing as he did in a period of very low morality—there probably never was a time when the general moral standard was lower in Europe than in the first half of the eighteenth century—and taking for his models a mass of writings dealing with unscrupulous adventures and intrigue, he has had to describe what is bad much oftener than what is good. But it is impossible to say either that he gloats over the vices and follies which he describes, or that he records them with cynical amusement, or that he holds them up for righteous detestation. The least little appearance of the second attitude may sometimes be found in the utterances of Asmodeus, which are as personal as anything we have of his ; but even this is, for the most part, dramatic merely. This quality, beyond all doubt, is connected with the former, and is, indeed, to a great extent implied by it. When a man is very much in earnest about points of morality, still more when he writes definitely with a moral or immoral purpose, he seldom succeeds in giving us the complete presentation of his characters. He is bribed, without knowing it, by his prepossessions, he cannot help, if he

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objects to the established standards of morality, softening the vicious characters unduly, or hardening them unduly if he be ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} among the moral subdivision of the heretics of instruction. I do not know that Lesage has been much examined by the strenuous advocates of the moral element in literature, though they have not neglected Fielding, his English parallel. The fact is that Fielding's irregular life rather assists them, while the little that is known of Lesage goes to show that he was in his own person an exemplary liver. It is, however, true that the resemblances between Fielding and Lesage are great, not merely in that they adopted the same general conception of the novel, but that they succeeded in working out that conception and in bringing their characters, or some of them, under the *species æternitatis*. An Englishman naturally speaks with some caution about Fielding, because he himself is not in so good a position as foreigners to judge how far Fielding has accomplished this. Englishmen, however, are the best possible judges of Lesage, because they are equally free from bias connected with the language in which he writes and from bias connected with the country which he illustrates.

There is one important and intricate question which can hardly be passed over, though here, at least, it can only be very summarily dealt with. It has been said that until the present century no

French writer, except Montaigne and Rabelais, deserves the title of humorist, and this would, of course, exclude Lesage. On the other hand, the exclusion has been objected to in the interest of some mediæval writers. The truth is, that the whole question turns on one of the most disputed points in literature—the definition of humour. If, as it has been admirably put, the humorist is a man who “thinks in jest when he feels in earnest”; or if, as Thackeray puts it, he is a week-day preacher, then Lesage most assuredly is not one. For not only has he no direct moral purpose (which, indeed, is oftener than not fatal to humour), but it is difficult to discern that he has, as Rabelais, Montaigne, and Shakespeare had, any general theory or grasp of the world or of life, whether poetical, ironical, or sceptical, which could supply him with the background necessary to the humorist. Neither had he, like Fielding and Thackeray himself, a passionate interest in that world—a sympathy with it which, in its way, is also sufficient to bring out the strokes of the strange invisible ink called humour. It would seem, therefore, that his exclusion is justified, and as he shares it with Molière, and even with La Fontaine, he need not be ashamed of his company. Like these still greater men, however, he had a wit so fine, so flexible, so far transcending the ordinary limitations of wit, that it almost amounted to humour, and may be said to be practically a substitute for it.

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This brings us to the consideration of a point of very great importance—the style of Lesage. In all such cases the modern ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE. reader who merely looks back is very likely to be deceived by his point of view. Yet even the modern reader, if he has but some notion of the date of his author, must, I should think, be conscious of a singular modernness in *Gil Blas* and the *Diable Boiteux* compared with Bossuet, Fénelon, even Malebranche, and still more with Madame de Sévigné and Saint-Simon. Lesage, indeed, was one of a line of great writers chiefly of the lighter kind, who, perhaps, did most of any of their contemporaries to shape French style, as it has been generally understood until recently. Saint-Evremond and Pascal are the earliest of these, and Lesage, taking up the torch, handed it on to Voltaire. It is noteworthy that Voltaire, perhaps on the principle of kicking down his ladders, was unjust both to Saint-Evremond and to Lesage, though, as has been said, the latter had certainly provoked him. The great distinction of Lesage is the extreme ease of his writing and the manner in which his good things, such as those already cited above, drop naturally out in the midst of his narrative or dialogue, without any effort or apparent leading up. It would demand a much greater acquaintance with Spanish literature than any to which I, even at second-hand, can pretend, to decide whether his studies had anything to do with this; but I think that

it may be tolerably safely assumed that they had not, except by way of contrast. For many, if not most, of the works which Lesage translated or followed were written in the extremest *gongorist* or conceited style—a style as remote from his as Lyly's from Steele's. It may possibly be contended that it was in fighting against this excess that Lesage learnt the secret of a wise economy. Certainly there are not merely few writers in whom there is so little archaism, affectation, mannerism, or deliberate oddity and obscurity, but also few in whom the style is so absolutely plain and unadorned, without being in the least vulgar, or, in the unfavourable sense, homely. His autobiographies, probably owing to this, have, more than most autobiographies, the air of being really told by a speaker and not elaborated in the study. There are no ponderous sentences, no phrases over which the reader sees that the pen has hung a long time, and, as has been already noted, none of the leading up and preparation which certain witty writers are unable to avoid or to conceal. The most commonplace things are said with perfect simplicity, and yet, somehow or other, in a way on which it is impossible to improve. It must be a bold man who thinks he can better a saying of Lesage's, and that not because of any *tour de force* of unusual phrase or out-of-the-way thought, but, on the contrary, because the simplicity has reached the lowest term. Nothing can

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be taken away, and nothing can be added that is not a useless addition.

The question of his alleged plagiar-
isms has been already, to some extent,
dealt with. It has been shown, that is to say,
that in the way of absolute stealing the charge
has not the slightest probability. The strongest
argument of all is, indeed, that when we see what
he did with originals which we possess, such as
Guzman d'Alfarache and the *Diablo Cojuelo*, there
could be no motive for discreditable appropri-
ation in other cases. But, when the charge in its
offensive sense has been laid aside, it remains to
consider the use which he did make of *publica
materies*. There can be no doubt that, as was
the case with Shakespeare and Molière, and many
other men of the very greatest genius, he made
wholesale and indiscriminate use thereof. There
is proof of this in many cases ; there is probability
of it in many more. Indeed, there is in this and
other instances almost ground for the paradox
that it is only men of little creative power who
are scrupulously original. Many very small poets,
by luck or by care, have kept free from the charge
of indebtedness to anybody, while Shakespeare
calmly versifies whole pages of North's "Plutarch" ;
while Molière compels restitution of his goods
from the unlucky people who happened to possess
them first without the least scruple ; while Milton
lays Dutch dramatists and French epic poets
and Italian opéra librettists under contribution as

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coolly as if they had been Royalist squires. In

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Lesage's case there is, however, something more than this. In the three great cases just mentioned, and in many others, it is only now and then that the borrowers condescend to borrow; it is a passing freak, or, to speak more respectfully and with more critical truth, an occasional conviction that here are the tools of which they themselves can make the best use. But there are some men, and those not among the least in literature, who, from a certain idiosyncrasy, which may, perhaps, be termed an indolence of brain, have seemed to prefer always, when it was possible, to work on beaten tracks and to take their start from some already accomplished work. The most remarkable example of this variety of talent in English literature is Dryden; the most remarkable in French literature is beyond all question Lesage. Yet Lesage must in respect of absolute originality be ranked below Dryden, because his greatest work, though its substance may be independent enough, springs in point of general design directly from Spanish originals, while the greatest work of Dryden, his satiric and didactic pieces, was not directly suggested by anything precedent. It may be said, indeed, that, of the four productions which we have singled out as exhibiting Lesage at his best, the two dramas are far more original than the two novels. Whether Lesage had he been more favoured by the exponents of the regular drama

and had he devoted himself longer thereto, would have produced something even more original than *Crispin* and *Turcaret* must ^{ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE.} be left among the merely scholastic problems of literature, the "might-have-beens" inquiry into which is bootless and idle. The time, however, had not come for any innovation on the set lines of French comedy and tragedy, even had the author been disposed for such innovation, and it is noteworthy enough that, when in his specially chosen province of the *Théâtre de la Foire* an opportunity appeared for a bold stroke, he declined it. On one occasion the jealousy of the regular actors had procured a police edict restricting their rivals to a single personage. The managers of the fair stage were in despair, for neither Lesage nor any of their other regular contributors would attempt the task of a monodrama, and recourse had to be had to the untried and fitful but fertile genius of Piron, whose *Arlequin Deucalion* got them out of the difficulty. This anecdote seems to argue a certain indisposition to try experiments which is consistent enough with what we have of Lesage's work. It must be remembered, too, that he did not begin literary labour very young, and that he did not make any great success in it until he was already a man of middle age. There are not wanting examples of striking originality in conception as well as striking power of execution displayed by late-writing authors. But on the whole it may,

perhaps, be safely said that invention is a habit as much as any other, and that it is a habit which is for the most part only acquired in youth.

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Such are the principal critical points which present themselves in the life of this great novelist and master of French prose. As one turns over the leaves of a library catalogue and sees the immense number of editions, translations, and what not, that *Gil Blas* has gone through and undergone in its century and a half of life, it is impossible not to draw the conclusion that its goodness is a matter settled and out of hand. One generation may make egregious mistakes, and constantly does make egregious mistakes, about an author, leaving him to unjust neglect, or awarding to him still more absurd triumphs. Subsequent generations may, in a way, continue the mistake by leaving the justice of the verdict, for or against, undisturbed, because the evidence is undisturbed likewise. But when a book has actually been read by half a dozen successive sets of the inhabitants of the earth, when its most remarkable incidents and characters have become part of the common stock of furniture possessed even by a very modest housekeeper in things literary, then there is not much reason for questioning the value. The works, even the best works, of Lesage are, of course, not good throughout. Even in *Le Diable Boiteux*, despite its moderate length, there are *longueurs*, and there

are most assuredly *longueurs* in *Gil Blas*. Some of it is obsolete, some could be well spared now, some, it is difficult not to think, could have been well spared at any time. But its best things are as fresh as ever, and are likely to continue so as long as human nature exists. The opening chapters, the address to the reader—Lesage was never happier than in his addresses to the reader, prefaces, and such like things—the episodes of Sangrado and the Archbishop, half a hundred things beside, are as amusing to read for the twentieth time as for the first. What is, perhaps, of more importance, the same may be said of the best passages, even in the work which has been less favoured by the general approbation. But at the same time no one who weighs his words will attempt to deny that Lesage has produced a considerable amount of inferior work side by side with his masterpieces. Nor can it be denied that, as has been more than once here allowed, his range is but limited, and that he seems to require a somewhat unusual amount of prompting and crutching before he is able to make his bow and say his say. These things debar him from the place among the chosen few of the writers of his country to which the wonderful success of his best work and the purity of his style would otherwise entitle him. In theoretical originality, in variety of work, in construction, he is very deficient. *Gil Blas* drags rather than hastens to its end, the author having

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failed completely to extricate himself from the toils of the endless episodes and digressions of his Spanish models. *Turcaret* in the same manner lacks unity and precision of plot. Excellence of style and surprising fidelity to human nature in character-drawing—these are the two pillars of Lesage's renown, and it is solidly established upon them. He is thus one of the few writers, to return to the point from which we started, of whom it can be definitely said that, if he had been in more fortunate worldly circumstances, he would have done better, unless, which is, perhaps, equally probable, he had done nothing at all. Possessing gifts which do not fall to the lot of one writer in a thousand, he did not always or very often succeed in getting those gifts into perfect working order. His selection of foreign subjects, and the very natural, though very unjust, suspicion of grave indebtedness to foreign models, have also worked against his fame. Yet, with those who have considered novel-writing seriously, he will always rank as one of the princes of character-drawing in its largest and most human sense, while with those who busy themselves with the history of French literature he will always hold the rank of the best writer of the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

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IV

A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY

THERE are few words in the use of which the power of fashion is at the present day more curiously illustrated than in the use of the word sensibility. As it is employed in the title of this essay, it will probably seem to some persons affected, or at the best peculiar. Yet "Sensibility, so charming" in verse, and the title of not the least delightful of Miss Austen's novels in prose, may suffice to clear the locution from the charge of latter-day Gallicism. There was most assuredly a time, when sensibility had in English the full Gallic sense of *sensibilité*—in fact, when it had reached the pitch which the French themselves were, and are, fain to designate by the intensification, coined for the purpose, of *sensiblerie*. The whole eighteenth century, but especially its later years, was the period of this use, and the great writer who has just been cited may suffice (as the present purpose is not to deal with English examples of the phenomenon) to

show what the end of sensibility was. Everybody has laughed, let us hope not un-

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kindly, over Marianne Dashwood's woes.

But Marianne was only an example, exaggerated in the genial fashion of her creatress, of the proper and recognised standard of feminine feeling. The "man of feeling" was admitted as something out of the way—on which side of the way opinions might differ. But the woman of feeling was emphatically the accepted type—a type which lasted far into the present age. The extraordinary development of emotion which was expected from women need not be illustrated merely from love stories. The wonderful transports of Miss Ferrier's heroines at sight of their long-lost mothers; even those of sober Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, at the recovery of her estimable but not particularly interesting brother William, give the keynote much better than any more questionable ecstasies. "Sensibility, so charming," was the pet affectation of the period—an affectation carried on, till it became quite natural, and was only cured by the half-caricature, half-reaction of Byronism.

The thing, however, was not English in origin, and never was thoroughly English at all. The production of it was one of the social triumphs of literature—one of the tricks played by that very odd demon which agitates the gray goose-quill. There is no trace of sensibility in Shakespeare's women, though they have plenty of passion; there

is little or none in any English author till French literature had acquired on the English mind a hold which here at least cannot be over-estimated, as it has been in various criticisms on other departments of letters. In poetry, drama, serious prose of all sorts, the verdict on Pope's charge of a victorious invasion of the Gauls must be Not Proven. In prose fiction it is hardly the same. Throughout the eighteenth century French romance was practically the model of all Europe, though it is noteworthy that the most vivid and enduring copies were taken from Lesage, who himself made no school in France, precisely because he was absolutely free from *sensibilité*. An extreme patriot might try to vindicate the dubious honour of paternity for this growth for Richardson, but chronology is against it. The spirit which had been first evolved in France certainly entered into the fat body of that printer in a very energetic manner, and returned therefrom, more vigorous and effectual than ever, to the country of its birth. But Richardson was only a parenthesis. The main current of the sensibility novelists who impressed their curious morals or manners on all men and women in civilised Europe, continued to be French in unbroken succession, from the day when Madame de la Fayette first broke ground against the ponderous romances of Madeleine de Scudéry, to the day when Benjamin Constant forged in *Adolphe* the link between eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century romance,

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between the novel of sentiment and the novel of analysis.

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One of the oddest things which strikes a student of this matter, is that the greatest names of prose fiction in the French eighteenth century fall somehow or other out of this current, at least out of its direct line, though they are all, except Lesage, more or less influenced by it. The author of *Gil Blas* is perhaps the greatest stumbling-block in literature to the product-of-the-circumstances and spirit-of-the-age formulas which have served for so much glib and picturesque literary exposition. The obstinate Breton ignores chronology and M. Taine in a manner which verges very closely on the disrespectful. It evidently never occurred to him that he had been only just of age when Madame de la Fayette died, that he was the contemporary of Marivaux, and not a great many years older than Richardson. He chose to be himself, and not a product of the century, and was rewarded on the one hand by the neglect of his countrymen then and ever since, and on the other by being the literary father of Fielding and every subsequent member of one of the two good schools of novelists. Prévost, almost a greater name than Lesage, inasmuch as *Manon Lescaut* is more uniformly and concentratedly good than *Gil Blas* or any of its fellows, is also hardly a novelist of sensibility. He tried it, as in his journalist fashion he tried everything, but it did not suit him, and so he wrote

several interminable romances of a kind of mild adventure, and one masterpiece of character-drawing which it is impossible to like too much, or to praise too much, or to read too much. Cr  billon's mistress was not sensibility, it was that with which sensibility has been said to "keep house"; and a very lively and agreeable household did this major-domo keep up for the less reputable of the two housemates. With Diderot (who chose to be eaten up with *sensibilit  * in other circumstances) it passed, as far as his fiction is concerned, into tragic moral portraiture in *La Religieuse*, into real pathos, free from all convention (which is of the essence of sensibility), in the one undisputed episode of *Jacques le Fataliste*, the famous story of the Marquis des Arcis. Rousseau took things too seriously for it, Voltaire not nearly seriously enough; and as for the great semi-novelists of the close of the century, Chateaubriand and Madame de Sta  l, they mix too many secondary purposes with their philandering, and, like the *philosophes* their fathers, are too much of pamphleteers. For the true sensibility, the odd quintessence of conventional feeling, played at steadily till it is half real if not wholly so, which ends in the peculiarities of two such wholesome young Britonesses as Marianne Dashwood and Fanny Price, we must look elsewhere. Madame de la Fayette, Madame de Fontaines, Madame de Tencin (most heartless and therefore naturally not least sentimental of women),

Marivaux, Madame Riccoboni, the group of lady novelists of whom Mesdames de Souza and de Duras are the chief; and, to finish, the two really remarkable names of Xavier de Maistre and Benjamin Constant—these are our “documents.” The subjects of the inquiry are pleasant pieces of literary *bric-à-brac*; perhaps they are something a little more than that. For sensibility was actually once a great power in the world. Transformed a little, it did wonderful things in the hands of Rousseau and Goethe and Chateaubriand and Byron. It lingers in odd nooks and corners even at the present day, when it is usually and irreverently called “gush,” and heaven only knows whether it may not be resuscitated in full force before some of us are dead. For it has exactly the peculiarities which characterise all recurrent fashions—the appeal to something which is genuine connected with the suggestion of a great deal that is not.

It may seem strange at first sight that the invention of this curiously unreal product should be set to the credit of a woman who, like Madame de la Fayette, had the credit of being “la femme la plus vraie” that her friends (and they included such terrible critics as Madame de Sévigné and La Rochefoucauld) professed to know. But the paradox is easily explicable. What Madame de la Fayette did was to change an utterly unreal style into one real enough to live and influence human beings. Many people talk about the

romances of Sapho (that is to say, Mademoiselle de Scudéry), but few people, I venture to suspect, have attempted to read them in the present day, and fewer have achieved the adventure. To find yourself in face of twenty-four authentic volumes, even if they be not very large duodecimos, and to know that these are one novel, is sufficiently appalling; and it is not in the least a consolation to be informed that there are really only twelve, because each is divided into two parts. But mere length is not a fatal obstacle. Madame de Sévigné's own letters probably fill, at least, as much actual space as the longest of the novels she delighted in, and they are not hard to read through. The impenetrability of the Scudéry romances does not lie in any actual literary inferiority, for there are excellent passages in them. But the atmosphere is so wholly unreal to a modern reader, that it simply asphyxiates him when he has to breathe it for the terribly long space of time necessary to follow the fortunes of the *Grand Cyrus*, or to explore thoroughly the geography of Tendre. Now Marie Madeleine de Lavergne, who married one of those remarkable husbands (frequent in French history and literature) of whom nobody ever hears anything, showed that she was a woman of genius, by doing two things with this deplorable kind of romance. She cut it down from the dimensions of an encyclopædia to those of a pamphlet, and she

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infused into its atmosphere a very considerable proportion of the breath of actual life and universal human nature. For the artificiality which still remained, and which gave the distinguishing character to sensibility, she had the excuse that it faithfully reproduced the tone of society; and society itself had more excuse for maintaining that tone at the time than is generally known. All impartial students of French literature are agreed that the conventional absurdities of the *précieuses*, their sighs and flames, their platonic affections, their elaborate gradations of the tender passion, were really an attempt, and a not unsuccessful attempt, at reform. To estimate the need that there was for reform, a course (which is not recommended *virginibus puerisque*) of Brantôme, followed by Tallemant des Réaux, is all that is necessary. What sort of manner the incomparable Arthénice (an anagram for Catherine, due to the combined wits of two celebrated poets, Malherbe and Racan, during a severe afternoon's study) had to soften and render human, might be made intelligible by two anecdotes (if it were only possible to quote them), the anecdote of the practical joke played by some of the finest gentlemen of France on a maid of honour, which is recorded by Brantôme, and the anecdote of the servant-girl who threw herself out of window, which is recorded by Tallemant. Knowledge of these facts does not in the least take off the edge

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of one's laughter at the *précieuses* 'ridicules' and the *femmes savantes*, but it enables one to respect Madame de Rambouillet and her friends while laughing at them, or rather at those who imitated and of course caricatured them. Madame de la Fayette's great merit is that she reduced this preciousness to manageable limits, and informed it with a great deal of wit and pathos. She is rather a considerable figure in literature, for besides her novels, she has left numerous and interesting letters (some of which have shocked her French admirers dreadfully, by showing that she did not entirely renounce interest in the things of this world when her friend La Rochefoucauld died), and some still more interesting memoirs on Henrietta Maria of England, of whom she saw much in the miserable days when the Queen had to depend on Mazarin's bounty, and on the early days of the sojourn of James II in France. But we have to do here only with *Zaïde* and the *Princesse de Clèves*, for her smaller novels, *Madame de Montpensier* and the *Comtesse de Tende*, may be omitted.

The first thing which strikes the reader (and it continued to mark the school till the genius of Marivaux and Prévost struck out a new line) is that the scenes of these novels are, with evident purpose, thrown into a remote period. In the *Princesse de Clèves* the author ventured so near her own day as the reign of Henri II, but *Zaïde*

(the earlier book) deals with an indistinct time in the dark ages of Spain. So also

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Madame de Fontaines, Madame de la Fayette's immediate borrower, threw the scene of *La Comtesse de Savoie* into the eleventh century, and that of *Amenophis* into a period of the history of Libya with which, I think, chronology has not much to do. The *Mémoires du Comte de Comminge* of Madame de Tencin is indeed exempt from this peculiarity, but it reappears in the *Siège de Calais* and the *Règne d'Edouard II* of the same author. In all these books, except those of Madame de la Fayette, the fault of contemporary French tragedy (a fault which, at the date of the *Princesse de Clèves*, had hardly been rendered inveterate by the principal sinner Racine) appears flagrantly. Not only is there no attempt at local colour, but the local colour of the writer's own country and time is audaciously thrust on the personages. However, the *Princesse de Clèves* is a very remarkable book in the history of literature, while the *Mémoires du Comte de Comminge* and the *Malheurs de l'Amour*, which in a way complete it, are books very important for the study of sensibility. Therefore some brief notice of them must be taken here.

The plot of the *Princesse de Clèves* is laid in the last days of the reign of Henri II, and though it is much complicated (for so short a book) with details, half historical and very cleverly drawn, of

Court incidents and intrigues, it is in the main simple enough. Madame de Clèves, married young to a husband who loves her, but whom she respects rather than loves, becomes the object of a violent but respectful passion on the part of Jacques de Savoie, Duke of Némours. She is perfectly virtuous, but greatly attracted by the duke, and the main interest of the book lies in her efforts to avoid and rebuff him. The central incident is the accidental overhearing by Némours of a conversation between the husband and wife, in which she begs him to take her away from the Court, where she is exposed to temptations which she fears she will not have the strength to resist. The ingenuity of this is that, while it "knots the intrigue," it leaves all the persons concerned in ignorance of the exact state of the case. M. de Clèves, receiving his wife's well-meant but very unpleasant confidence, perceives that he has lost her heart, whether anybody else has gained it or not. Madame de Clèves is unaware that her lover has overheard her, and Némours himself, though of course delighted at the confession of weakness, is by no means sure (since no names are mentioned) that he is the subject of her doubts. This eccentric but not wholly unnatural situation is admirably treated. The commonplaces of sensibility proper are absent for the most part, the somewhat high-flown sentiments are excused, partly by the real pathos of the situation, and partly by

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the slight archaism of the language and the stately manners displayed. Madame de Clèves's virtuous resolve is maintained to the end, but her unlucky husband none the less dies of a broken heart, perhaps the only ending consistent with keeping up the strain of the situation, and at the same time, not making him ridiculous. The conflict of feeling in both is excellently rendered, and the reader puts down the book with the feeling that for all its artificiality and its promise of sensibility to come, it deserves its repute as the earliest of modern novels properly so called. All that can be said against it is, first, that the characters talk a great deal too much about their sentiments and emotions; and secondly, that in talking about them they use too much of a certain official jargon appropriated to the subject. That is the beginning of the misdeeds of sensibility in literature.

In the followers of Madame de la Fayette we find that a good many years have passed by. The jargon has grown still more official; and instead of using it to express genuine sentiments, which in another language might deserve expression well enough, the characters are constantly suspected by the callous modern reader of elaborately, though perhaps unconsciously, feigning the sentiments which the jargon seems to imply that they ought to have. This is somewhat less noticeable in the work of Madame de Tencin than elsewhere, because d'Alembert's mother was

so very much cleverer a person than the generality of the novel-writers of her day, that she could hardly fail to veil defects A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. more cunningly. But it is evident enough in the *Comte de Comminge* and in the *Malheurs de l'Amour*. Having as questionable morals as any lady of the time (the time of the Regency), Madame de Tencin of course always had a moral purpose in her writings, and this again gives her books a certain difference. But like the former, this difference only exposes all the more clearly the defects of the style and the drawbacks from which it was almost impossible that those who practised it should escape.

Madame de Tencin tried to escape by several gates. Besides her moral purposes and her *esprit*, she indulged in a good deal of rather complicated and sometimes extravagant incident. *M. de Comminge*, which is very short, contains, not to mention other things, the rather startling detail of a son who, out of chivalrous affection for his lady-love, burns certain of his father's title-deeds which he has been charged to recover, and the still more startling incident of the heroine living for some years in disguise as a monk. The following epistle, however, from the heroine to the hero, will show better than anything else the topsy-turvy condition which sensibility had already reached. All that need be said in explanation of it is that the father (who is furious with his son, and not unreasonably so) has shut him up in a dungeon,

in order to force him to give up his beloved
Adelaide.

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you : I know what your generosity had concealed from me. I know, too, the terrible situation in which you are, and I have no means of extracting you therefrom save one. This will perhaps make you more unhappy still. But I shall be as unhappy as yourself, *and this gives me the courage to do what I am required to do.* They would have me, by engaging myself to another, give a pledge never to be yours : 'tis at this price that M. de Comminge sets your liberty. It will cost me perhaps my life, certainly my peace. But I am resolved. I shall in a few days be married to the Marquis de Bénavidés. What I know of his character forewarns me of what I shall have to suffer ; *but I owe you at least so much constancy as to make only misery for myself in the engagement I am contracting.*

The extremity of calculated absurdity indicated by the italicised passages was reached, let it be remembered, by one of the cleverest women of the century, and the chief excuse for it is that the restrictions of the La Fayette novel, confined as it was to the upper classes and to a limited number of elaborately distressing situations, were very embarrassing. One of Madame de Tencin's, "beasts" (as she called her literary *protégés*) came to rescue it from this parlous condition, and by reducing it to common life, toning down the pitch considerably, and adding the charm of a most remarkable mannerism and sentimental casuistry, to give it a new lease of life.

There are not many odder "persons than

Marivaux in the history of literature. For mere cleverness, and even for a certain kind of originality, he had few equals, and yet he is hardly read at all, and survives chiefly by virtue of a term coined from his name, and used generally in an uncomplimentary sense. The enmity of the *philosophes* (whom he followed not, and to whom he used to say rude things) would scarcely account for this. His own ill-luck in having lost his fortune in the Mississippi scheme, and in being obliged to write for bread, is hardly more conclusive. The real fault seems to have been a deficiency in power of concentration—of fixing a definite plan, and then definitely working it out. As actors will not accept an unfinished play, or perform it one act at a time, Marivaux was obliged to complete his dramatic works. In the thirty or forty of these which exist, there is ample stuff for half the number of thoroughly good ones, but hardly a single one as it stands can be said to be thoroughly good. He began divers periodicals on the plan of Defoe's *Review*, and the more famous papers of Steele and Addison. The public bought them, and would have continued to buy them, but as they never came out on the proper days, and occasionally took holidays of indefinite length, the subscribers got tired. *Marianne* dragged itself over about fifteen years, and never was finished at all. Whether Marivaux ever wrote more than the first five parts of the *Paysan Parvenu* is a disputed

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point, but the evidence seems strongly against it, and even if the later parts are in some measure his, they do not finish the story. A man of this kind does not allow himself a chance, and it was certainly fortunate for Marivaux that he lived in the days when giving and receiving pensions was fashionable.

Nevertheless, *Marianne* and the *Paysan Parvenu* are among the most remarkable examples of the novel of *sensibilité*, especially the first. The *Paysan Parvenu*, which ought to have some interest for English readers, inasmuch as it undoubtedly suggested *Joseph Andrews*, just as *Marianne* is not likely to have been without some influence on *Pamela*, is in its certainly genuine portion so very incomplete, and has besides so many different purposes (such as that of at once rivalling and rebuking Cr  billog), that it is a less perfect example of the style. It is also rather a repulsive one, and one cannot help thinking that Marivaux, who was much more of a satirist than is sometimes supposed, meant it as in some degree a caricature, thus playing Fielding to his own Richardson. There is something very comic in the garrulosity of the autobiographic footman. He is, as was to be expected from his station, a little crude; but he has his own point of honour, and that point of honour turns on a modification of the sensibility of his betters. Thus a "sensible" footman need not, like the two Josephs, repulse the advances of

his master's wife, but he must by no means consent to espouse a pretty waiting-maid under suspicious circumstances. Hav-^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} ing married an elderly *dévoté* (sensibility below stairs does not forbid this), there is nothing to prevent him from engaging in simultaneous commerces (as the word went) with divers ladies of rank. But the first intimation that he has of the fact that one of these ladies can be herself simultaneously "sensible" to another, sends him off in a huff of virtuous and sensible disgust. The Jacob of the *Paysan* is, however, rather an enigma, and, at least hypothetically, a caricature.

Marianne itself is not by any means free from a certain touch of the same sarcasm. The comical gravity with which the garrulous heroine talks of the importance of dress, the half humorous fashion in which she displays her own vanity, interfere with the picture of pure sensibility. Indeed, *Marianne* is such a thorough coquette, that on modern standards her virtue, irreproachable as it is in practice, becomes a little suspect. But still the book is a very important one, perhaps the most important in the history of sensibility in fiction. To confess the truth, it is from any other than the purely literary view rather hard reading nowadays. Marivaux's tricks of style, his extraordinary involutions and labyrinths of metaphysical gallantry and sentiment, are agreeable enough. But there is next to no story, and the characters are not, according to modern ideas,

very interesting. Marianne herself is as arrant a little minx as ever dropped her A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. eyelids and then lifted them. Her remark when, an orphan of unknown birth and penniless, she is asked whether the place of companion will suit her—"Il me semble que j'aimerais mieux mourir que d'être chez quelqu'un en qualité de domestique, et si j'avais mon père et ma mère il y a toute apparence que j'en aurais moi même au lieu d'en servir à personne"—is one of the earliest literary expressions of definite and pronounced snobbishness, a fact which for the credit of the English nation I am glad to point out.

What story there is can be very quickly told. An improbably bloodthirsty gang of footpads massacres a whole coachful of passengers, except a little girl of between two and three years old, whose parentage it is impossible to trace. Some officers who pass carry the child to the neighbouring village priest, and leave her with the provision of a small subscription. She is brought up by the good *curé*, but a chapter of unimportant and sufficiently natural accidents leaves her stranded in Paris, with no friends and only a little money. A monk, who is her only acquaintance, recommends her to the patronage of a pious and middle-aged gentleman, M. de Climal, who accepts the charge, but is unfortunately tempted of the devil, Marianne being extraordinarily pretty. At first he keeps within paternal limits, though the girl, innocent as she

is, suspects something. An accident hurries on matters. She goes to church in her new clothes, makes a great sensation,^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} and in coming home is half run over by a carriage, and sprains her ankle. A young man who has noticed her in the sacred edifice conveys her into his house and sends for a surgeon. The pair fall in love with each other at first sight in the most approved sensibility style. To them (the surgeon being gone, and M. de Valville, the young man, being on his knees in the correct attitude of adoration) enters M. de Climal, who happens to be Valville's uncle. The upshot of all this is that the exemplary M. de Climal makes undisguised proposals to Marianne, which she virtuously refuses, and flies to a convent. Here she finds a benevolent lady who patronises her afresh, and who happens (everything "happens" in an eighteenth-century novel) to be Valville's mother. The young man, tracing Marianne to the convent, renews his suit; M. de Climal repents and dies, leaving Marianne a legacy, and the mother makes no objection to the union of the two lovers. Other relations are, however, less complying, and a plot is got up to separate them. The real separation comes, however, from Valville's own inconstancy. He deserts Marianne for an English girl, Miss Warton, the daughter of a Jacobite refugee. A huge *Histoire d'une Religieuse* is then inserted parenthetically, and the book is abruptly left unfinished. Years

afterwards Madame Riccoboni added to it an exceedingly clever *Suite*, approved by
A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. Marivaux, and some unknown person composed a wretchedly clumsy *Fin*, which usually has the very undeserved honour of figuring in the book as it is printed, while Madame Riccoboni's capital work is left out.

The mere story of Marianne, however (except that it is so little likely to be within the actual knowledge of readers, that some sketch of it is necessary to make remarks on it intelligible), has little to do with our purpose. The book is important here as illustrating a new and important stage in the sensibility novel. Hitherto, as has been seen, it had dealt chiefly with altogether fantastic scenes and personages, the latter almost uniformly of exalted rank. Marianne, it is true, is supposed (though not proved by Marivaux) to be of noble blood. But the whole framework and conditions of her story are those of quite ordinary life. The homely vividness of Madame Dutour, the shopkeeper with whom Marianne's perfidious protector places her, is very curious to come upon after the superfine atmosphere of the La Fayette-Tencin novels. But Marianne's own sentiments, when they are not sarcastic or purely coquettish, are distinguished by the most advanced *sensibilité*. "Je pense," she says in a sentence which is at once characteristic of *sensibilité* in sense and of *marivaudage* in manner, "je pense pour moi qu'il n'y a que le sentiment qui nous

puisse donner des nouvelles un peu sûres de nous, et qu'il ne faut trop se fier à celles que notre esprit veut faire à sa guise : A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. car je le crois un grand visionnaire."

Here is a longer passage, which Catherine Morland herself might have written—

I had resolved not to sleep another night in the house. I cannot indeed tell you what was the exact object of my fear, or why it was so lively. All I know is that I constantly beheld before me the countenance of my landlord, to which I had hitherto paid no particular attention, and then I began to find terrible things in this countenance. His wife's face, too, seemed to be gloomy and dark; the servants looked like scoundrels; all their faces made me in a state of unbearable alarm. I saw before me swords, daggers, murders, thefts, insults. My blood grew cold at the perils I imagined.

A profound belief in "le sentiment," or "le cœur," and an extremely lively imagination—these are two infallible notes of *sensibilité*. But Marianne shall give us some more. When the Monk and M. de Climal are settling her destiny, the heroine's fine mind is terribly shocked by the open way in which her future obligations to her patron are spoken of.

I must tell you that, young as I was, I had a soul not devoid of pride. I had been brought up affectionately, and even, to a certain extent, respectfully, and I was much disturbed by a conversation of this nature. Men accompany their benefits with a clumsiness of manner very humiliating to the person who receives them. They had pulled my misfortune to pieces for an hour, and talked of nothing but the pity I inspired, the merit of doing me good, the religious duty of helping me, together with a whole load of other charitable sentiments and devout reflections.

And so the young lady goes on at great length, displaying a delicacy of mind which would be admirable in a giver of benefits, but which is perhaps not quite so admirable in a receiver of them. This kind of pseudo-dignity, which strongly objects to be called dependent, but has no objection to be so, must also, I fear, be set down as a note of sensibility. So again Marianne (who has been, let it be remembered, brought up all her life in a country village by people of a class then very little above the peasantry themselves) feels, in the frank good-nature of Madame Dutour, "quelque chose de grossier qui me rebutait," and a "ton brusque qui blessait ma délicatesse." She accepts M. de Climal's gifts willingly enough, but is dreadfully disturbed when Madame Dutour remarks on his "charité." As for the first scene with Valville, the whole of it is a running commentary on the queer kind of love-making which sensibility affected. The duty of love at first sight was one of the canons of the sensible church, and Valville and Marianne obey it in the most orthodox fashion. They have seen each other, let it be remembered, only during the few but well-spent minutes of a single mass, and they have not yet spoken.

For my part, I spoke to others but not to him, any more than he did to me. I did not even dare to look at him, though not doing so made me long to do it all the more. So at last I looked, hardly venturing the glance, and I do

not know what my eyes told him, but his made so tender a reply that mine must have deserved it. That made me blush, while my heart beat a STUDY OF to that degree that I hardly knew what was SENSIBILITY. going to happen to me. Never in my life have I been so agitated, and I cannot define my feelings. They were a mixture of trouble, of pleasure, and of fear—yes, of fear. For a young girl who is a novice knows not where all this is going to lead her. There are unknown impulses which surround her, which make her obey, which she controls not, which control her, and the novelty of this state of things alarms her. It is true that she finds it pleasant, but it is a pleasure which looks like a danger, and which frightens her modesty. There is something which threatens, which bewilders, which overpowers her. One would fain in these moments ask oneself what is going to happen, for love does not deceive us. As soon as he shows himself he tells what he is and what it all means. The soul hails in him a master who caresses it, but with a manner of authority which asks not its leave, and allows it, if it chooses, to suspect its future slavery.

And all this at sixteen, at first sight, and after a country life with an aged priest and his sister! Of course some allowance must be made for the inevitable *marivaudage*—for the tendency, as Crébillon wickedly put it, to say “not only everything you have said and everything you have thought, but also everything you would have liked to think but did not.” After this allowance has been made, there is a very considerable residuum which expresses the “sensible” idea of the birth of love, a fourth and very welcome assistance to the comprehension of sensibility. The whole scene is full of further instruction on this important

point, for most of which, unluckily, there is no room here. Thus we have a valuable distinction between "amoureux" and "tendre." Tenderness, it seems, is "a fashion of attachment which at first makes the heart well disposed (*honnête*), instils into it morality" (*lui donne des mœurs*), and restricts it to "the delicate pleasure of timidly loving, and respecting what it loves." But it is not possible to spend more time on this agreeable and instructive study of the acutest form of *sensibilité* in this its palmy days. Let it be sufficient to say that other parts of *Marianne* contain passages nearly as instructive as to the feelings of the truly sensible heart towards benefactors (Madame de Miran, Madame Dorsin), towards friends of the same sex (Mademoiselle Warton), towards enemies (an insulting young person who causes Marianne the keenest agony by remarking that somebody pays for her board at the convent), etc. etc. And all in the middle of this curious book comes this curious sentence, in which Marivaux either consciously or not writes the Mene Tekel of sensibility. "Enfin ces agitations tant agréables que pénibles, s'affaiblirent et se passèrent. L'âme s'accoutume à tout; sa sensibilité s'use: et je me familiarisais avec mes espérances et mes inquiétudes." All things pass certainly, but the flutters of sensibility pass faster than anything else.

Marivaux, however, was of too old a generation

to exemplify sensibility finally or in its over-ripe stage. Those who came after him, and had his work and that of the ^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} La Fayette-Fontaines-Tencin school before them, completed the presentation. The reasons for not dwelling on the works of the great masters—of Diderot, of Rousseau, of Madame de Staël—have already been hinted at and are evident enough. In the first place, a stronger spirit than mere sensibility enters into them; in the second, they are very often novels with a purpose, which the sensibility-novel proper never is. Among Marivaux's immediate successors, neither Duclos nor Crébillon need be mentioned, because they are out of the style, as is Prévost for different reasons. Madame Riccoboni, however, who has just been mentioned as continuing *Marianne*, shows the completed product very fairly. Her *Histoire du Marquis de Cressy* is a capital example of the kind. The Marquis is beloved by a charming girl of sixteen and by a charming widow of six-and-twenty. An envious rival betrays his attentions to Adelaide de Bugei, and her father makes her write an epistle which pretty clearly gives him the option of a declaration in form or a rupture. For a sensible man it must be confessed that the Marquis does not get out of the difficulty too well. She has slipped into her father's formal note the highly sensible postscript, "Vous dire de m'oublier? Ah! Jamais. On'm'a forcé de l'écrire"; rien ne peut m'obliger à le penser

ni le désirer." Apparently it was not leap-year, for the Marquis replied in a letter nearly as bad as Willoughby's celebrated epistle in *Sense and Sensibility*.

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MADEMOISELLE—Nothing can console me for having been the innocent cause of fault being found with the conduct of a person so worthy of respect as you. I shall approve whatever you may think proper to do, without considering myself entitled to ask the reason of your behaviour. How happy should I be, mademoiselle, if my fortune and the arrangements which it forces me to make did not deprive me of the sweet hope of an honour of which my respect and my sentiments would perhaps make me worthy, but which my present circumstances permit me not to seek.

Sensibility does not seem to have seen anything very unhandsome in this broad refusal to throw the handkerchief; but though not unhandsome, it could not be considered satisfactory to the heart. So M. de Cressy despatches this private note to Adelaide by "Machiavel the waiting-maid"—

Is it permitted to a wretch who has deprived himself of the greatest of blessings, to dare to ask your pardon and your pity? Never did love kindle a flame purer and more ardent than that with which my heart burns for the amiable Adelaide. Why have I not been able to give her those proofs of it which she had the right to expect? Ah! mademoiselle, how could I bind you to the lot of a wretch all whose wishes even you perhaps would not fulfil? who, when he possessed you, though master of so dear, so precious a blessing, might regret others less estimable, but which have been the object of his hope and desire, etc. etc.

This means that M. de Cressy is ambitious, and wants a wife who will assist his views. The

compliment is doubtful, and Adelaide receives it in approved fashion. She opens it "with a violent emotion," and her "trouble" ^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} was so great in reading it through, that she had to begin it again many times before she understood it." The exceedingly dubious nature of the compliment, however, strikes her, and "tears of regret and indignation rise to her eyes"—tears which indeed are excusable even from a different point of view than that of sensibility. She is far, however, from blaming that sacred emotion. "Ce n'est pas," she says; "de notre sensibilité mais de l'objet qui l'a fait naître que nous devons nous plaindre." This point seems arguable if it were proper to argue with a lady.

The last letter to be cited is from Adelaide's unconscious rival, whose conduct is—translated into the language of sensibility, and adjusted to the manners of the time and class—a ludicrous anticipation of the Pickwickian widow. She buys a handsome scarf, and sends it anonymously to the victorious Marquis just before a Court ball, with this letter—

A sentiment, tender, timid, and shy of making itself known, gives me an interest in penetrating the secrets of your heart. You are thought indifferent; you seem to me insensible. Perhaps you are happy, and discreet in your happiness. Deign to tell me the secret of your soul, and be sure that I am not unworthy of your confidence. If you have no love for any one, wear this scarf at the ball. Your compliance may lead you to a fate which others envy. She

who feels inclined to prefer you is worthy of your attentions, and the step she takes to let you
A STUDY OF know it is the first weakness which she has
SENSIBILITY. to confess.

The modesty of this perhaps leaves something to desire, but its sensibility is irreproachable. There is no need to analyse the story of the *Marquis de Cressy*, which is a very little book and not extremely edifying. But it supplies us with another *locus classicus* on sentimental manners. M. de Cressy has behaved very badly to Adelaide, and has married the widow with the scarf. He receives a letter from Adelaide on the day on which she takes the black veil—

'Tis from the depths of an asylum, where I fear no more the perfidy of your sex, that I bid you an eternal adieu. Birth, wealth, honours, all vanish from my sight. My youth withered by grief, my power of enjoyment destroyed, love past, memory present, and regret still too deeply felt, all combine to bury me in this retreat.

And so forth, all of which, if a little high-flown, is not specially unnatural; but the oddity of the passage is to come. Most men would be a little embarrassed at receiving such a letter as this in presence of their wives (it is to be observed that the unhappy Adelaide is profuse of pardons to Madame as well as to Monsieur de Cressy), and most wives would not be amiable when they read it. But Madame de Cressy has the finest sensibility of the amiable kind. She reads it, and then—

The Marquise, having finished this letter, cast herself into the arms of her husband, and clasping him with an inexpressible tenderness, "Weep, A STUDY OF sir, weep," she cried, bathing him with her SENSIBILITY. own tears; "you cannot show too much sensibility for a heart so noble, so constant in its love. Amiable and dear Adelaide. 'Tis done, then, and we have lost you for ever. Ah! why must I reproach myself with having deprived you of the only possession which excited your desires? Can I not enjoy this sweet boon without telling myself that my happiness has destroyed yours?"

All Madame Riccoboni's work is, with a little good-will, more or less interesting. Much of it is full of italics, which never were used so freely in France as in England, but which seem to suit the queer exaggerated topsy-turvyfied sentiments and expressions very well. The *Histoire d'Ernestine* in particular is a charming little novelette. But if it were possible to give an abstract of any of her work here, *Milady Catesby*, which does us the honour to take its scene and personages from England, would be the one to choose. *Milady Catesby* is well worth comparing with *Evelina*, which is some twenty years its junior, and the sentimental parts of which are quite in the same tone with it. Lord Ossery is indeed even more sensible than Lord Orville, but then he is described in French. Lady Catesby herself is, however, a model of the style, as when she writes—

Oh! my dear Henrietta! What agitation in my senses! what trouble in my soul! . . . I have seen him. . . . He has spoken to me. . . . Himself. . . . He was at the ball. . . . Yes! he. Lord Ossery. . . . Ah! tell me not again to see him. . . . Bid me not hear him once more.

That will do for Lady Catesby, who really had
 no particular occasion or excuse for
 all this excitement except sensibility.

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But sensibility was getting more and more exacting. The hero of a novel must always be in the heroics, the heroine in a continual state of palpitation. We are already a long way from Madame de la Fayette's stately passions, from Marianne's whimsical *minauderies*. All the resources of typography—exclamations, points, dashes—have to be called in to express the generally disturbed state of things. Now unfortunately this sort of perpetual tempest in a teacup (for it generally is in a teacup) requires unusual genius to make it anything but ludicrous. I myself have not the least desire to laugh when I read such a book as *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and I venture to think that any one who does laugh must have something of the fool and something of the brute in his composition. But then Rousseau is Rousseau, and there are not many like him. At the Madame Riccobonis of this world, however clever they may be, it is difficult not to laugh when they have to dance on such extraordinary tight ropes as those which sensibility prescribed.

The writers who were contemporary with Madame Riccoboni's later days, and who followed her, pushed the thing, if it were possible, even farther. In Madame de Genlis's tiny novelette of *Mademoiselle de Clermont*, the amount of tears

shed, the way in which the knees of the characters knock together, their palenesses, blushes, tears, sighs, and other performances of the same kind, are surprising. In the *Lettres du Marquis de Roselle* of Madame Elie de Beaumont (wife of the young advocate who defended the Calas family), a long scene between a brother and sister, in which the sister seeks to deter the brother from what she regards as a misalliance, ends (or at least almost ends, for the usual flood of tears is the actual termination) in this remarkable passage.

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"And I," cried he suddenly with a kind of fury, "I suppose that a sister who loves her brother, pities and does not insult him; that the Marquis de Roselle knows better what can make him happy than the Countess of St. Séver; and that he is free, independent, able to dispose of himself, in spite of all opposition." With these words he turned to leave the room brusquely. I run to him, I stop him, he resists. "My brother!" "I have no sister." He makes a movement to free himself: he was about to escape me. "Oh, my father!" I cried. "Oh, my mother! come to my help." At these sacred names he started, stopped, and allowed himself to be conducted to a sofa.

This unlucky termination might be paralleled from many other places, even from the agreeable writings of Madame de Souza. This writer, by the way, when the father of one of her heroes refuses to consent to his son's marriage, makes the stern parent yield to a representation that by not doing so he will "authorise by anticipation

a want of filial attachment and respect" in the grandchildren who do not as yet exist. These excursions into the preposterous in search of something new in the way of noble sentiment or affecting emotion—these whippings and spurrings of the feelings and the fancy—characterise all the later work of the school.

Two names of great literary value and interest close the list of the novelists of sensibility in France, and show at once its Nemesis and its caricature. They were almost contemporaries, and by a curious coincidence neither was a Frenchman by birth. It would be impossible to imagine a greater contrast than existed personally between Xavier de Maistre and Henri Benjamin de Constant-Rebecque, commonly called Benjamin Constant. But their personalities, interesting as both are, are not the matter of principal concern here. The *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, its sequel the *Expédition Nocturne*, and the *Lépreux de la Cité d'Aoste*, exhibit one branch of the river of sensibility (if one may be permitted to draw up a new Carte de Tendre), losing itself in agreeable trifling with the surface of life, and in generous, but fleeting, and slightly, though not consciously, insincere indulgence of the emotions. In *Adolphe* the river rushes violently down a steep place, and in *nigras lethargi mergitur undas*. It is to be hoped that most people who will read these pages know Xavier de Maistre's charming little

books ; it is probable that at least some of them do not know *Adolphe*. Constant is the more strictly original of the two A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. authors, for Xavier de Maistre owes a heavy debt to Sterne, though he employs the borrowed capital so well that he makes it his own, while *Adolphe* can only be said to come after *Werther* and *René*, not in the least to follow them.

The *Voyage autour de ma Chambre* (readers may be informed or reminded) is a whimsical description of the author's meditations and experiences when confined to barracks for some military peccadillo. After a fashion which has found endless imitators since, the prisoner contemplates the various objects in his room, spins little romances to himself about them and about his beloved Madame de Hautcastel, moralises on the faithfulness of his servant, Joannetti, and so forth. The *Expédition Nocturne*, a less popular sequel, is not very different in plan. The *Lépreux de la Cité d'Aoste* is a very short story, telling how the narrator finds a sufferer from the most terrible of all diseases lodged in a garden-house, and of their dialogue. The chief merit of these works, as of the less mannerised and more direct *Prisonnier du Caucase* and *Jeune Sibérienne*, resides in their dainty style, in their singular narrative power (Sainte-Beuve says justly enough that the *Prisonnier du Caucase* has been equalled by no other writer except Mérimée), and in the

remarkable charm of the personality of the author

which escapes at every moment from
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the Chevalier de B—— in the *Soirées de St. Pétersbourg*, which Joseph de Maistre is said to have drawn from his less formidable brother, often suggests itself as one follows the whimsicalities of the *Voyage* and the *Expédition*. The affectation is so natural, the mannerism so simple, that it is some time before one realises how great in degree both are. Looked at from a certain point of view, Xavier de Maistre illustrates the effect of the sensibility theory on a thoroughly good-natured, cultivated, and well-bred man of no particular force of character or strength of emotion. He has not the least intention of taking sensibility seriously, but it is the proper thing to take it somehow or other. So he sets himself to work to be a man of feeling and a humorist at the same time. His encounter with the leper is so freshly and simply told, there is such an air of genuineness about it, that it seems at first sight not merely harsh, but unappreciative, to compare it to Sterne's account of his proceedings with his monks and donkeys, his imaginary prisoners, and his fictitious ensigns. But there is a real contact between them. Both have the chief note of sensibility, the taking an emotion as a thing to be savoured and degusted deliberately—to be dealt with on scientific principles and strictly according to the

rules of the game. One result of this proceeding pursued for a considerable time is unavoidably a certain amount of frivolity, ^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} especially in dealing with emotions directly affecting the player. Sympathy such as that displayed with the leper may be strong and genuine, because there is no danger about it; there is the *suave mari magno* preservative from the risk of a too deep emotion. But in matters which directly affect the interest of the individual it does not do to be too serious. The tear of sensibility must not be dropped in a manner giving real pain to the dropper. Hence the humoristic attitude. When Xavier de Maistre informs us that "le grand art de l'homme de génie est de savoir bien élever sa bête," he means a great deal more than he supposes himself to mean. The great art of an easy-going person, who believes it to be his duty to be "sensible," is to arrange for a series of emotions which can be taken gently. The author of the *Voyage* takes his without any extravagance. He takes good care not to burn his fingers metaphorically in this matter, though he tells us that in a fit of absence he did so literally. His affection for Madame de Haut-castel is certainly not a very passionate kind of affection, for all his elaborately counted and described heartbeats as he is dusting her portrait. Indeed, with his usual candour, he leaves us in no doubt about the matter. "La froide raison," he says, "reprit bientôt son empire." Of course it

did ; the intelligent, and in the other sense sensible, person who wishes to preserve his repose must take care of that. We do not even believe that he really dropped a tear of repentance on his left shoe when he had unreasonably rated his servant ; it is out of keeping with his own part. He borrowed that tear either ironically or by oversight from Sterne, just as he did "Ma chère Jenny." He is much more in his element when he proves that a lover is to his mistress, when she is about to go to a ball, only a "decimal of a lover," a kind of amatory tailor or ninth part of man ; or when in the *Expedition* he meditates on a lady's slipper in the balcony fathoms below his garret.

All this illustrates what may be called the attempt to get rid of sensibility by the humorist gate of escape. Supposing no such attempt consciously to exist, it is, at any rate, the sign of an approaching downfall of sensibility, of a feeling on the part of those who have to do with it that it is an edged tool, and an awkward one to handle. In comparing Xavier de Maistre with his master, Sterne, it is very noticeable that while the one in disposition is thoroughly insincere, and the other thoroughly sincere, yet the insincere man is a true believer in sensibility, and the sincere one evidently a semi-heretic. How far Sterne consciously simulated his droppings of warm tears, and how far he really meant them, may be a matter of dispute.

But he was quite sincere in believing that they were very creditable things, and very admirable ones. Xavier de Maistre does ^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} not seem by any means so well convinced of this. He is at times not merely evidently pretending and making believe, but laughing at himself for pretending and making believe. He still thinks sensibility a *gratissimus error*, a very pretty game for persons of refinement to play at, and he plays at it with a great deal of industry and with a most exquisite skill. But the spirit of Voltaire, who himself did his *sensibilité* (in real life, if not in literature) with nearly as much sincerity as Sterne, has passed over Xavier de Maistre. The Savoyard gentleman is sincerely and unexceptionably orthodox in religion; it may be doubted whether a severe inquisition in matters of sensibility would let him off scatheless. It is not merely that he jests—as for instance, that when he is imagining the scene at the Rape of the Sabines, he suddenly fancies that he hears a cry of despair from one of the visitors. “Dieux immortels ! Pourquoi n’ai j’amené ma femme à la fête ?” That is quite proper and allowable. It is the general tone of levity in the most sentimental moments, the undercurrent of mockery at his own feelings in this man of feeling, which is so shocking to sensibility, and yet it was precisely this that was inevitable. Sensibility, to carry it out properly, required, like other elaborate games, a very peculiar and elaborate arrangement of

conditions. The parties must be in earnest so far as not to have the slightest suspicion that they were making themselves ridiculous, and yet not in earnest enough to make themselves really miserable. They must have plenty of time to spare, and not be distracted by business, serious study, political excitement, or other disturbing causes. On the other hand, to get too much absorbed, and arrive at Werther's end, was not only destructive to the individual player, but to the spirit of the game. As the century grew older, and this danger of absorption grew stronger, the game became more and more difficult to play seriously enough, and yet not too seriously. When the players did not blow their brains out, they often fell into the mere libertinism from which sensibility, properly so called, is separated by a clear enough line. Two such examples in real life as Rousseau and Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, one such demonstration in fiction of the same moral as *Werther*, were enough to discourage the man of feeling. Therefore, when he still exists, he takes to motley, the only wear for the human race in troublesome circumstances which beset it with unpleasant recurrence. When you cannot exactly believe anything in religion, in politics, in literature, in art, and yet neither wish nor know how to do without it, the safe way is to make a not too grotesque joke of it. This is a text on which a long sermon might be hung were it worth while.

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But as it is, it is sufficient to point out that Xavier de Maistre is an extremely remarkable illustration of the fact in the particular ^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} region of sentimental fiction.

Benjamin Constant's masterpiece, which (the sequel to it never having appeared, though it was in existence in manuscript half a century ago) is also his only purely literary work, is a very small book, but it calls here for something more than a very small mention. The books which make an end are almost fewer in literature than those which make a beginning, and this is one of them. Like most such books, it made a beginning also, showing the way to Beyle, and through Beyle to all the analytic school of the present century. Space would not here suffice to discuss the singular character of its author, to whom Sainte-Beuve certainly did some injustice, as the letters to Madame Recafnier, which have had such an odd fate, show, but whose political and personal experiences as certainly call for a large allowance of charity. The theory of *Adolphe's* latest editor, M. de Lescure, which also was the accepted theory long before M. de Lescure's time, that the heroine of the novel was Madame de Staël, will not, I think, hold water. In every characteristic, personal and mental, Ellénore and Madame de Staël are at opposite poles. Ellénore was beautiful, Madame de Staël was very nearly hideous; Ellénore was careless of her social position, Corinne was as great a slave to society as any one who ever lived;

Ellénore was somewhat uncultivated, had little *esprit*, was indifferent to flattery, took not much upon herself in any way

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except in exacting affection where no affection existed; the good Corinne was one of the cleverest women of her time, and thought herself one of the cleverest of all times, could not endure that any one in company should be of a different opinion on this point, and insisted on general admiration and homage. However, this is a very minor matter. What is important is that Madame de Staël was almost the last genuine devotee of sensibility, and that *Adolphe* was certainly written by a lover of Madame de Staël, who had from his youth up been a man of feeling of a singularly unfeeling kind. When Constant wrote the book he had run through the whole gamut of sensibility. He had been instructed as a youth by ancient women of letters; he had married and got rid of his wife *à la mode Germanorum*; he had frequently taken a hint from *Werther*, and threatened suicide with the best possible results; he had given, perhaps, the most atrocious example of the atrocious want of taste which accompanied the decadence of sensibility, by marrying Charlotte von Hardenburg out of pique, because Madame de Staël would not marry him, then going to live with his bride near Coppet, and finally deserting her, newly married as she was, for her very uncomely but intellectually interesting rival. In short, according to the theory

of a certain ethical school, that the philosopher who discusses virtue should be thoroughly conversant with vice, Benjamin Constant was a past master in sensibility. It was at a late period in his career, and when he had only one trial to go through (the trial of, as it seems to me, a sincere and hopeless affection for Madame Recamier), that he wrote *Adolphe*, or at least that he published it, and its appearance was almost contemporary with his one unpardonable political fault, his condescension to Napoleon in the Hundred Days. This, however, is accidental, and of no direct bearing on the book, which has nothing whatever to do with 1815, the date which it bears. It is, as has been said, the history of the Nemesis of sensibility, the prose commentary by anticipation on Mr. Swinburne's admirable "Stage Love"—

Time was chofus, gave them cues to laugh and cry,
They would kill, befool, amuse him, let him die ;
Set him webs to weave to-day and break to-morrow,
Till he died for good in play and rose in sorrow.

That is a history in one stanza of sensibility, and no better account than *Adolphe* exists of the rising in sorrow.

The story of the book opens in full eighteenth century. A young man, fresh from the University of Göttingen, goes to finish his education at the *residenz* of D——. Here he finds much society, courtly and other. His chief resort is the house of a certain Count de P——, who lives, unmarried,

with a Polish lady named Ellénore. In the easy-going days of sensibility the *ménage* holds a certain place in society, though it is looked upon a little askance.

But Ellénore is on her own theory thoroughly respectable, and the Count de P——, though in danger of his fortune, is a man of position and rank. As for Adolphe, he is the result of the struggle between sensibility, an unquiet and ironic nature, and the teaching of a father who, though not unquiet, is more ironically given than himself. His main character is all that a young man's should be from the point of view of sensibility. • “Je ne demandais alors qu'à me livrer à ces impressions primitives et fougueuses,” etc. But his father snubs the primitive and fiery impressions, and the son, feeling that they are a mistake, is only more determined to experience them. • Alternately expanding himself as sensibility demands, and making ironic jests as his own nature and his father's teaching suggest, he acquires the character of “un homme immoral, un homme peu sur,” the last of which expressions may be paralleled from the British repertory by “an ill-regulated young man,” or “a young man on whom you can never depend.” All this time Adolphe is not in love, and as the dominant teaching of sensibility lays it down that he ought to be, he feels that he is wrong. “Je veux être aimé, me dis-je, et je regardai autour de moi. Je ne voyais personne qui m'inspirât de l'amour ; personne qui

me parut susceptible d'en prendre." In parallel case the ordinary man would resign himself as easily as if he were in ^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.} face of the two conditions of having no appetite and no dinner ready. But this will not do for the pupil 'of sensibility. He must make what he does not find, and so Adolphe pitches on the luckless Ellénore, who "me parut une conquête digne de moi." To do sensibility justice, it would not, at an earlier time, have used language so crude as this, but it had come to it now. Here is the portrait of the victim, drawn by her ten years younger lover.

Ellénore's wits were not above the ordinary, but her thoughts were just, and her expression, simple as it was, was sometimes striking by reason of the nobility and elevation of the thought. She was full of prejudices, but she was always prejudiced against her own interest. There was nothing she set more value on than regularity of conduct, precisely because her own conduct was conventionally irregular. She was very religious, because religion rigidly condemned her mode of life. In conversation she frowned on pleasantries which would have seemed quite innocent to other women, because she feared that her circumstances might encourage the use of such as were not innocent. She would have liked to admit to her society none but men of the highest rank and most irreproachable reputation, because those women with whom she shuddered at the thought of being classed usually tolerate mixed society, and, giving up the hope of respect, seek only amusement. In short, Ellénore and her destiny were at daggers drawn; every word, every action of hers was a kind of protest against her social position. And as she felt that facts were too strong for her, and that the situation could be changed by no efforts of hers, she was exceedingly

miserable.

The struggle between her feelings and her circumstances had affected her temper.

A STUDY OF She was often silent and dreamy: some-
SENSIBILITY. times, however, she spoke with impetuosity.

Beset as she was by a constant preoccupation, she was never quite calm in the midst of the most miscellaneous conversation, and for this very reason her manner had an unrest and an air of surprise about it which made her more piquant than she was by nature. Her strange position, in short, took the place of new and original ideas in her.

The difference of note from the earlier eighteenth century will strike everybody here. If we are still some way from Emma Bovary, it is only in point of language: we are poles asunder from Marianne. But the hero is still, in his own belief, acting under the influence of sensibility. He is not in the least impassioned, he is not a mere libertine, but he has a "besoin d'amour." He wants a "conquête." He is still actuated by the odd mixture of vanity, convention, sensuality, which goes by the name of sensibility. But his love is a "dessin de lui plaire"; he has taken an "engagement envers son amour propre." In other words, he is playing the game from the lower point of view—the mere point of view of winning. It does not take him very long to win. Ellénore at first behaves unexceptionably, refuses to receive him after his first declaration, and retires to the country. But she returns, and the exemplary Adolphe has recourse to the threat which, if his creator's biographers may be believed, Constant himself was very fond of employing in similar

cases, and which the great popularity of *Werther* made terrible to the compassionate and foolish feminine mind. He will kill himself. She hesitates, and very soon she does not hesitate any longer. The reader feels that Adôlphe is quite worthless, that nothing but the fact of his having been brought up in a time when sensibility was dominant saves him. But the following passage, from the point of view alike of nature and of expression, again pacifies the critic :—

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I passed several hours at her feet, declaring myself the happiest of men, lavishing on her assurances of eternal affection, devotion, and respect. She told me what she had suffered in trying to keep me at a distance, how often she had hoped that I should detect her notwithstanding her efforts, how at every sound that fell on her ears she had hoped for my arrival ; what trouble, joy, and fear she had felt on seeing me again ; how she had distrusted herself, and how, to unite prudence and inclination, she had sought once more the distractions of society and the crowds which she formerly avoided. I made her repeat the smallest details, and this history of a few weeks seemed to us the history of a whole life. Love makes up, as it were by magic, for the absence of far-reaching memory. All other affections have need of the past, love as by enchantment makes its own past and throws it round us. It gives us the feeling of having lived for years with one who yesterday was all but a stranger. Itself a mere point of light, it dominates and illuminates all time. A little while and it was not : a little while and it will be no more : but as long as it exists its light is reflected alike on the past and on the future.

This calm, he goes on to say, lasted but a short time ; and, indeed, no one who has read the book

so far is likely to suppose that it did. Adolphe has entered into the *liaison* to play the game, Ellénore (unluckily for herself) to be loved. The difference soon brings discord. In the earlier sensibility days men and women were nearly on equal terms. It was only in the most strictly metaphorical way that the unhappy lover was bound to expire, and his beloved rarely took the method of wringing his bosom recommended by Goldsmith when anybody else of proper sensibility was there to console her. But the game had become unequal between the Charlottes and the Werthers, the Adolphes and the Ellénores. The Count de P—— naturally perceives the state of affairs before long, and as naturally does not like it. Adolphe, having played his game and won it, does not care to go on playing for love merely. “Ellénore était sans doute un vif plaisir dans mon existence, mais elle n’était pas plus un but—elle était devenue un lien.” But Ellénore does not see this accurate distinction. After many vicissitudes and a few scenes (“Nous vécumes ainsi quatre mois dans des rapports forcés, quelque fois doux, jamais complètement libres, y rencontrant encore du plaisir mais n’y trouvant plus de charme”) a crisis comes. The Count forbids Ellénore to receive Adolphe any more; and she thereupon breaks the ten years old union, and leaves her children and home. Her young lover receives this riveting of his chains with consternation, but he does his best. He defends

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her in public, he fights with a man who speaks lightly of her, but this is not what she wants.

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Of course I ought to have consoled her. I ought to have pressed her to my heart and said, "Let us live for each other; let us forget the misjudgments of men; let us be happy in our mutual regard and our mutual love." I tried to do so, but what can a resolution made out of duty do to revive a sentiment that is extinct? Ellénore and I each concealed something from the other. She dared not tell me her troubles, arising from a sacrifice which she knew I had not asked of her. I had accepted that sacrifice; I dared not complain of ills which I had foreseen, and which I had not had courage enough to forestall. We were therefore silent on the very subject which occupied us both incessantly. We were prodigal of caresses, we babbled of love, but when we spoke of it we spoke for fear of speaking of something else.

Here is the full Nemesis of the sentiment that, to use Constant's own words, is "neither passion nor duty," and has the strength of neither, when it finds itself in presence of a stronger than itself. There were none of these unpleasant meetings in sensibility proper. There sentiment met sentiment, and "exchanged itself," in Chamfort's famous phrase. When the rate of exchange became unsatisfactory it sought some other customer,—a facile and agreeable process, which was quite consistent in practice with all the sighs and flames. Adolphe is not to be quit so easily of his conquest. He is recalled by his father, and his correspondence with Ellénore is described in one of the astonishingly true passages which make the book so remarkable.

During my absence I wrote regularly to Ellénore. I was divided between the desire of not hurting her feelings and the desire of truthfully representing my own. I should have liked her to guess what I felt, but to guess it without being hurt by it. I felt a certain satisfaction when I had substituted the words "affection," "friendship," "devotion," for the word "love." Then suddenly I saw poor Ellénore sitting sad and solitary, with nothing but my letters for consolation, and at the end of two cold and artificial pages I added in a hurry a few phrases of ardour or of tenderness suited to deceive her afresh. In this way, never saying enough to satisfy her, I always said enough to mislead her, a species of double-dealing the very success of which was against my wishes and prolonged my misery.

This situation, however, does not last. Unable to bear his absence, and half puzzled, half pained by his letters, Ellénore follows him, and his father for the first time expresses displeasure at this compromising step. Ellénore being threatened with police measures, Adolphe is once more perforce thrown on her side, and elopes with her to neutral territory. Then events march quickly. Her father's Polish property, long confiscated, is restored to him and left to her. She takes Adolphe (still struggling between his obligations to her and his desire to be free) to Warsaw, rejects an offer of semi-reconciliation from the Count de P——, grows fonder and more exacting the more weary of her yoke her lover becomes; and at last, discovering his real sentiments from a correspondence of his with an artful old diplomatic friend of his father's, falls desperately ill and dies in his arms.

A prologue and epilogue, which hint that Adolphe, far from taking his place in the world (from which he had thought his *liaison* A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. debarred him), wandered about in aimless remorse, might perhaps be cut away with advantage, though they are defensible, not merely on the old theory of political justice, but on sound critical grounds.

This was the end of sensibility in more senses than one. It is true that five years later than *Adolphe* appeared Madame de Duras's charming novelettes of *Ourika* and *Edouard*, in which something of the old tone revives. But they were written late in their author's life, and avowedly as a reminiscence of a past state of sentiment and of society. "Le ton de cette société," says Madame de Duras herself, "était l'engouement." As happy a sentence, perhaps, as can be anywhere found to describe what has been much written about, and, perhaps it may be said without presumption, much miswritten about. *Engouement* itself is a nearly untranslatable word. It may be clumsily but not inaccurately defined as a state of fanciful interest in persons and things which is rather more serious than mere caprice, and a good deal less serious than genuine enthusiasm. The word expresses exactly the attitude of French polite society in the eighteenth century to a vast number of subjects, and, what is more, it helps to explain the *sensibilité* which dominated that society. The two terms mutually involve each other, and *sensibilité* stands

to mere flirtation, on the one hand, and genuine passion on the other, exactly as *engouement* does to caprice and enthusiasm.

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People flirted admirably in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the art has been recovered in the nineteenth with some success, but I do not think they flirted, properly speaking, in the eighteenth. Sensibility prevented that. But, on the other hand, they did not, till the society itself and its sentiments with it were breaking up, indulge in anything that can be called real passion. Sensibility prevented that also. The kind of love-making which was popular may be compared without much fancifulness to the favourite card game of the period, quadrille. You changed partners pretty often, and the stakes were not very serious; but the rules of the game were elaborate and precise, and it did not admit of being treated with levity.

Only a small part, though the most original and not the least remarkable part of the representation of this curious phenomenon in literature, has been attempted in this essay. The English and German developments of it are interesting and famous, and merely as literature contain perhaps better work than the French, but they are not so original. Marivaux served directly as model to both English and German novelists, though the peculiarity of the national temperament quickly made itself felt in both cases. In England the great and healthy genius of Fielding applied the humour cure to

sensibility at a very early period.; in Germany the literature of sensibility rapidly became the literature of suicide—a consum-^{A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY.}mation than which nothing could be more alien from the original conception. It is true that there is a good deal of dying in the works of Madame de la Fayette and her imitators. But it is quite transparent stage-dying, and the virtuous Prince of Clèves and the penitent Adelaide in the *Comte de Comminge* do not disturb the mind at all. We know that as soon as the curtain has dropped they will get up again and go home to supper quite comfortably. It is otherwise with Werther and Adolphe. With all the first-named young man's extravagance, four generations have known perfectly well that there is something besides absurdity in him, while in Adolphe there is no extravagance at all. The wind of sensibility had been sown in literature and in life for many a long year, and the whirlwind had begun to be reaped.

This, however, is the moral side of the matter, with which we have not much to do. As a division of literature these sentimental novels, artificial as they are, have a good deal of interest. They are so entirely different in atmosphere from the work of our own times, that reading them has all the refreshing effect, of a visit to a strange country. They are often extraordinarily ingenious, and the books to which in form they set the example, though the genius of the writers made them

something very different in matter—*Julie, La Religieuse, Paul et Virginie, Corinne, René*
A STUDY OF SENSIBILITY. —give their progenitors not a little importance, or at least not a little interest of curiosity. Besides, it was in the school of sensibility that the author of *Manon Lescaut* somehow or other developed that wonderful little book. I do not know that it would be prudent to recommend modern readers to study sensibility for themselves in the original documents. Disappointment and possibly maledictions would probably be the result of any such attempt, except in the case of Marivaux, Xavier de Maistre, and Constant. But these are just the cases in which the office of critic justifies itself. It is often said (and nobody knows the truth of it better than critics themselves) that a diligent perusal of all the studies and *causeries* that have ever been written on any one of the really great writers will not give as much knowledge of them as half an hour's reading of their own work. But then in that case the metal is virgin, and to be had on the surface and for the picking up. The case is different where tons of ore have to be crushed and smelted in order to produce a few pennyweights of metal.

V

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WHEN the author of *Walter Lorraine* obtained praise and profit by that performance, it is recorded that his uncle was so CHARLES DE BERNARD. much surprised as to be almost angry.

"I never read your novels and rubbish," said he. "Except Paul de Kock, who certainly makes me laugh, I don't think I have looked into a book of the sort these thirty years." It is probable that Major Pendennis was by no means singular in reading certain books because they made him laugh. The quality which happens to produce that effect varies, of course, according to the idiosyncrasy of the reader. But still there is a clearly defined class of books which, though widely enough, different in other ways, agree with one another in the possession of this peculiar faculty of amusing. They are not always intentionally comic—indeed, the intentionally comic book is often the last which succeeds in its intention; but they are emphatically light literature. Their

display of character may be, and to some extent must be, truthful and even masterly, but we do not read them as studies of character. Their pictures of the manners of their time must have facility and power, but we do not read them as we read Congreve or Molière. Their end, whether consciously proposed or not, is simple amusement, and the higher qualities which they may possess merely subserve this end.

There is usually a certain slightness about writers of this sort, and this slightness does not often give them a long life even in their capacities of amusement-purveyors. What tickles one generation frequently bores another. Sometimes, however, an author comes who, without the humour which might exalt him into the place of great writers, and while still belonging to the class to which no other word than light can be applied, still has enough salt in him to keep him alive after the generation which originally he made laugh has long passed away. There are not very many such writers; and there are perhaps more of them in French than in any other language. To this class undoubtedly belongs the novelist with whom it is now my purpose to deal. Charles de Bernard cannot be called a great novelist or a great writer; his work is nearly as slight as it is pleasant, and the characters of his innumerable novelettes blend and confuse themselves in the memory in a way in which the characters of the

great novelist are never confused or blended. But for the actual amusement of the time occupied in reading him, and in the character of time-killer, he may challenge comparison with almost any artist in fiction. It is possible that Thackeray's avowed and frequently expressed admiration may have been the means of introducing a large number of his English readers to him. But it is certain that the friends whom he thus gains by the intervention of another, he keeps by his own merits, and that no one who knows a good story when he sees it will hesitate to extend his acquaintance, however that acquaintance may have been formed, with the author of *La Femme de Quarante Ans* and *Le Gendre*.

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It was some little time before Charles de Bernard (who was born in 1805 and had a short and not eventful life) adopted the style in which he was to attain so striking a success. He began with poetry and criticism, and it must be confessed that his poetry is, if not actually bad, hopelessly mediocre, and that his criticism is not much better. Balzac, however, took him under his protection, a protection which was at least, and probably at most, flattering. It was under the directions of the great novelist that he began to write novels, though fortunately he did not obey Balzac's suggestions to the letter in adopting the historical and heroic style. For about ten years he wrote constantly. At the end of this time a terrible disease came upon him, and in 1850 he died

from exhaustion, and inability to take nourishment. His life appears to have been almost entirely domestic, and very happy. He had no enemies, personal or literary, and his melancholy death seems to have been sincerely regretted, far beyond the rather narrow circle of his personal friends.

His ten years' work came at an interesting moment. He was old enough to have taken part in the great Romantic effort. But at that time he was a provincial with no Parisian friends, and his efforts to establish himself in literary work were long unsuccessful. He was, moreover, a strong Royalist, less of the sentimental than the rational type, and was therefore out of harmony both with the purely artistic and with the enthusiastically republican schools of the movement. When he had succeeded in establishing himself as a writer, the tide, if it had not turned, was turning. *Lucrèce* had not yet been played, but the days of *Antony* and *Hernani* were over. There is thus little directly Romantic in Charles de Bernard's work, though the movement, like most other contemporary things, comes in occasionally for his gentle and good-humoured satire. The results of his ten or twelve years' labour occupy about as many volumes; four of which are taken up with his only books of great length, *Un Beau-père* and *Le Gentilhomme Campagnard*. Three contain each a separate book of moderate size, *Un Homme Sérieux*, *Les Ailes*

d'Icare, and *Gerfaut*. The remainder present the work in which his genius is most fully represented, a score or so of delightful tales rarely exceeding some sixty or seventy pages in length, but perfect in proportion, crammed with invention and originality, and saturated with the purest and pleasantest essence of the spirit which for six centuries in fabliaux, farces, tales in prose and verse, comedies, and correspondence, made French literature the delight and recreation of Europe.

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That these shorter stories are not only the best things that their author did, but also the best things that he could do, I have no doubt whatever. A careful examination will indeed show that the merits of his longer works are the merits of his shorter ones, while their defects are exactly those which the composition of the shorter stories excludes. Take, for instance, *Un Beau-père*, the longest but one, and unquestionably the worst of its author's books. It has all the appearance of a shorter story unnaturally drawn out and prolonged. We have, to start with, a dinner. First, the guests do not come; when they do come, a strange interruption occurs; they have to go out and while away the time, and when they at last sit down, some eighty pages have been gone through. One feels that the thing is altogether out of proportion, and that the dinner is a nuisance. It would have made a good *nouvelle* of itself, under the title of "The Hungry

Host," or something of that sort. Treated more shortly, it would have made a good introduction to a longer story ; but, as it stands, it is a mistake. So also in *Le Gentilhomme Campagnard*, the reception of the marquis, with which that charming story opens, is made disproportionately prominent in the same manner. I think that even *Gerfaut* would have been very much better if it had been designed on the scale of *Un Persécuteur* and *L'Innocence d'un Forçat*, but this will doubtless seem heresy to those who consider *Gerfaut* Bernard's masterpiece. I cannot, however, myself avoid thinking that these critics have allowed their judgment of the book as a whole to be biassed by their admiration of the incomparable sketches of Marillac and Made-moiselle de Corandeuil. *Les Ailes d'Icare* and *Un Homme Sérieux* are indeed well sustained throughout ; but even these a clever arranger might easily split up into shorter stories that would be better than the present wholes.

This, however, must be a matter very much of individual taste, and it is time to leave generalities and allow the author to speak for himself, as far as he can, in some narrative abstract of parts of his work. For this purpose I shall take *Un Homme Sérieux*, of the longer works, and *Le Gendre* of the smaller.

Un Homme Sérieux opens with all the proper ceremonies. We are introduced to the courtyard

of the Paris Post-Office, where two persons, one of whom has evidently no desire to be recognised by the other, are waiting for the arrival of the Lille diligence. It appears at last, and from it emerges a complete provincial family — father, daughter, and son. The father is the “*Homme Sérieux*” himself, M. Chevassu, just elected deputy of the Nord, inheritor of three hundred years of unbroken *roture*, and in his own estimation a very great man indeed. One of the persons expectant is his jackal—a jackal, indeed, who has secretly made up his mind to have very much more than the jackal’s share—a certain André Dornier, journalist by profession, whom it suits to serve the deputy as private secretary. The other is the Vicomte de Moréal, a very accomplished young gentleman, who, in Chevassu’s eyes, is hopelessly condemned by the ineradicable and unpardonable sin of noble birth. That these two are rivals for the hand of Henriette Chevassu, every experienced person will see at once, and the author makes no secret of it in the first few pages. As for the sensible man’s son and heir, Prosper, he is a clerk who crosses his father’s soul very frequently and very sadly. He has, in contradistinction to his sire’s respectable liberalism, adopted the wildest revolutionary politics. He has already achieved the destruction of a journal started by M. Chevassu at Douai, with Dornier for editor, by inserting in it inflammatory articles; he has a personal

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friendship for Moréal, mixed up in the queerest way with a determination that his sister shall never marry an aristocrat, and he is, generally speaking, a mass of the most amusing absurdities and contradictions. The list of the *dramatis personæ* is completed by Chevassu's sister and her husband. The lady has tarnished the purity of the Chevassu *roture* by marrying a marquis, the Marquis de Pontailly, who is altogether of the old style, self-indulgent and passionate, but a gentleman to the backbone, and in the affairs of private life a famous diplomatist. Madame de Pontailly adores intellect, and thus rather favours Dornier.

The reader must not think that in giving this elaborate description of the battlefield and the combatants, I am doing the author a wrong. It is the plan which he himself almost invariably adopts in his longer novels, and particularly in this one, according to the traditions of the older fiction. To a merely modern taste it may seem to have some of the drawbacks of the Euripidean prologue, and it must be admitted that the history of that unfortunate newspaper, *Le Patriote Douaisien*, is given at somewhat unnecessary length. But, on the other hand, it may be contended that the more modern plan of beginning in the middle is quite as often a device for concealing the want of art as an instrument for exhibiting the possession of it. To return, it is clear that as M. Chevassu is a widower, and has come to Paris merely to

discharge his functions as deputy; his daughter will have to be under the charge of her aunt. Thus it becomes necessary for ^{CHARLES} ~~DE~~ BERNARD. Moréal to lay siege to the Pontailly *salon*. Fortunately his father has been an old comrade of the marquis in the hard and yet jovial days of the emigration, when one painted still life and the other turned snuff-boxes for a livelihood. M. de Pontailly responds to an appeal, pays the viscount a visit, and promises every assistance. But the question is, how Moréal shall conciliate the aunt, over whom her husband frankly enough confesses himself to possess no direct influence. Fortunately the young man is a poet—it is 1834, remember,—and on being pressed he reads a specimen of his verse to his visitor. M. de Pontailly selects a piece entitled “La Fête Romaine,” rejecting absolutely certain “Jours de Tristesse,” “Illusions Perdues,” and so forth; he innocently supposes that “La Fête Romaine” must be about the carnival, of which he has pleasant recollections. He will hear “La Fête Romaine”—

M. de Pontailly gave the manuscript back to Moréal; he then threw himself back in his chair, rested his chin on one of his hands, put the other in his waistcoat, and half-shutting his eyes, presented so formidable an attitude of attention that the young poet felt himself as nervous as if he had been in presence of a whole high commission of critics. His voice, as he began to read his verses, trembled somewhat. “La Fête Romaine” was the history of the martyrdom of the Christians under Nero, and the chief parts in it were played by the claws of the tigers and the torches of the executioner, rendered in violent outline and

glaring colours after the fashion of certain contemporary productions of the poetical kind. When he

CHARLES had finished his reading, the viscount turned DE BERNARD. upon his hearer one of those modest smiles with which an author is wont to invite the indulgence of his judge. M. de Pontailly's attitude had undergone a slight change. His arms hung by his sides, his head reclined on the back of the chair, his mouth was slightly open, and his eyes were closed ; in fact, he appeared to be enjoying a peaceful and refreshing slumber. At this spectacle the demon of irritability, which is supposed particularly to attend upon poets, plunged his talons into Moréal, and, with an involuntary movement, he crushed his manuscript in his hand and flung it on the table. The old man instantly opened his eyes, raised himself, and looking ironically at the viscount, said, "Don't disturb yourself. I was not asleep ; I was thinking." You young men of to-day are certainly very curious people. When you wish to sing, you either weep or bellow. You yourself, for instance, how nicely you caught me with your title ! I might have known better. You call that a *fête* ? A Roman *fête* ? I wonder what Pasquin and Marforio would say to it. A *fête* ? Why didn't you call it an Auto da Fé, or a cannibal's feast, or a day in the shambles ? If that is your taste, it is not mine. Your *fête* smells of the slaughter-house and the pitch-kettle. For my part, I like the smell of roses or of old Falernian better. Yes, I would rather have Albano than Spagnoletto. Besides, any one can lay on black and red, while really pretty colouring is no such easy matter. I used to make verses too when I was young—you need not be afraid, I have forgotten them, and therefore I can't take my revenge. All I can remember of them is that they were at least lively."

However, the old man, though satirical, is not ill-natured. He decides that, as the verses are after all verses, they will do admirably for Madame de Pontailly, and proposes that the presentation shall take place at once.

Meanwhile the deputy of the Nord, who has come up determined to lead the affairs of the nation, has discovered that ^{CHARLES DE BERNARD.} those of his own household will give him some trouble. He receives very unflattering accounts of Prosper's law studies, and Henriette refuses flatly to marry Dornier, so that his son and daughter are both in open revolt. Moréal's star is more kindly. By great good luck it happens to be "poetry day" with Madame de Pontailly. The viscount is presented, is asked his opinion on a literary point, and, assisted by a little signal from the marquis, delivers it in complete accord with the lady's own. Then he is requested to recite, and selects the most plaintive of all his lamentable verses. His success is complete, and his rival, who appears at the moment and tries to sneer at the poem, is severely snubbed. Nor do Dornier's misfortunes end there, for shortly afterwards he is involved by the hot-headed Prosper in one of the political demonstrations of the moment, and both are locked up by the police, who thereby interfere with certain warlike designs on Moréal which the pair have formed.

But while everything thus appears to be going well, an unexpected misfortune occurs. Madame de Pontailly has indeed taken Moréal into favour, but she is neither too old nor too literary to have given up coquetry, and she is by no means disposed to abandon such a promising cavalier to her niece.

Hence, instead of assisting the course of true love, she does all she can to hinder it, and at last persuades her brother to send Henriette, in honourable captivity, to a boarding-school.

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Nor is fate kinder to the ambitious designs of M. Chevassu. Under the promptings of Dornier, he has resolved to try and get together a small party in the Chamber. As a preliminary measure he has asked those with whom he wishes to act to tea and discussion—

About nine o'clock the guests arrived, and the conversation, dealing exclusively with the tactics to be adopted during the session, became lively. Suddenly the door opened, and there entered a very unexpected personage, to wit, Prosper Chevassu. As he recognised his son, the deputy frowned, and his face expressed a vague disquiet, while his colleagues gazed with surprise at the curiously unparliamentary appearance of the new-comer. At last he said, "Gentlemen, I have the honour to present my son to you."—"Just escaped," added Prosper pompously, "from the dungeons of authority."—"Ah!" remarked a deputy to his neighbour, "it must be the noisy fellow who was arrested in the disturbance on Friday. What a ruffian he looks." As a matter of fact, the student's appearance was a little terrible. The lower half of his countenance was unshaved and blackened, the upper was flushed with the wine he had drunk at his uncle's, and his eyes sparkled in such a manner that he might have been an excellent model for an artist who wished to paint a Bacchanal, but was likely rather to shock gentlemen who considered gravity the first of virtues. Without appearing in any way embarrassed by his father's gloomy looks, Prosper went up to the table, filled his cup, took some bread and butter, and proceeded to establish himself in the midst of the group of talkers in front of the fire. "Gentlemen," he said, with superb coolness, "I

perceive that I have the honour to be in the society of deputies. I am much gratified at making your acquaintance, inasmuch as it is my purpose to address a petition to the Chamber without delay. I shall take the liberty of inviting your support thereto now.”—“Prosper,” said M. Chevassu anxiously, “remember to whom you are speaking.” “In your house, father,” replied the son, “I can only be speaking to honourable citizens, enemies of arbitrary power, and defenders of popular rights.”—“Well,” said a stout man of gruff countenance, “you wish to petition us. May I ask what about?”—“I desire,” said Prosper, “to draw the attention of the Chamber to the monstrous abuse of illegal imprisonment which we daily witness. I myself have been the victim of an outrage of this sort; it is therefore my duty to bell the cat of ministerial tyranny.”—“Why; what have you got to complain of?” rejoined the deputy brusquely. “You make a disturbance in the streets, and you are arrested. Where is the injustice? You might have stayed at home.” “Where is the injustice, sir!” cried Prosper, whose countenance became yet more inflamed; “is it then henceforward to be illegal to take an after-dinner walk on the Boulevard? Is it then to be the right of the minions of tyranny to bludgeon the peaceable citizen to whom exercise is recommended by his medical advisers? Is it then——” “He must be mad,” said the stout man half aloud. “They called Brutus mad,” replied the student in disdainful tones. “Hold your tongue, Prosper,” interrupted M. Chevassu. “Pray, gentlemen, excuse this vivacity in a young man who thinks himself arbitrarily treated.” But Prosper did not allow him to finish. “Father,” said he, with vehemence, “make no excuses. With one exception I feel sure that these gentlemen understand and share my indignation. Were I deceived, sympathy will not fail me elsewhere. The Chamber of Deputies is after all but an infinitesimal fraction of the country, and if those who compose it slumber in culpable apathy, there are without its limits patriot-hearts that are awake.”

These audacious words were received with a murmur of

disapproval. "This is becoming scandalous," said one. "It is an insult to the Chamber," said another.

CHARLES "Such a tirade is intolerable," said a third. In DE BERNARD. vain M. Chevassu, who was on thorns, exclaimed, "Prosper! Prosper!" The student, in this moment of general emotion, sipped his tea calmly and surveyed the assembly with a sarcastic air. When he had finished his cup, he put it down. "Gentlemen," said he with humour, "I claim the indulgence of the House that I may reply to this call to order. I claim it in accordance with the rules of the House itself." This irreverent parody redoubled the murmurs. "I thought," said one, "that we came to discuss a serious question seriously, not to listen to schoolboy jokes."—"Sir," replied Prosper, "I am not a schoolboy, and you are not my master. I know indeed that I am guilty of the crime of youth, an unpardonable crime in the eyes of a gerontocracy. But a day will come when the rising generation cannot be longer kept in a state of helotry. Yes," continued he, gesticulating in his ardour, "the day will come. I call to witness the memory of the men of Eighty-nine and the glorious traditions of the Republic."

A covey of partridges, startled by the report of a fowling-piece, could not be more alarmed than were the representatives of the nation at hearing this terrible word whistle past their ears. Those who were standing rushed for their hats; those who were sitting rose. In a moment the whole body were making for the door with parliamentary discipline and unanimity. In vain M. Chevassu tried to stop them; he was as successful as the hapless shepherd of the victims of Panurge, and all he got was a pretty sharp speech from the fat deputy. "Monsieur Chevassu, the man who aspires to be the head of a political party, had better first be head of his own house. I do not pretend to direct my colleagues; but not one of my four sons would dare to call his soul his own in my presence. My advice on this point, sir, is at your service. I cannot say the same of my support in the Chamber."

The woes of the deputy, however, do not help

Moréal, notwithstanding that Prosper, who considers himself ill-treated by Dornier in the matter of their deliverance CHARLES DE BERNARD. from prison, transfers his valuable allegiance to the viscount. The difficulty is now to find the school in which Henriette is immured. Moréal, however, accomplishes this, hires an adjoining house, and across the familiar garden-wall converses sweetly with his beloved. This intercourse is discovered, and the marquise, furious at it, encourages Dornier to carry off her niece. The plot is discovered by M. de Pontailly, and valiantly frustrated by Moréal, all of course ending well. Even the austere deputy is partially reconciled to the marriage by Moréal's promise to be, at any rate up to that event, *un homme sérieux*, to cut off his beard, wear a frock-coat, and above all to write no verses.

Such is a meagre account of a charming book. Meagre as it is, however, it may show in what the charm consists. It lies in the constant succession of amusing scenes, such as that which I have translated, sometimes between Prosper and his father, sometimes between Moréal and the marquise, sometimes between M. de Pontailly and any or all of the characters. Of anything like a central interest there is next to nothing. The scenes hang well together, and one is carried on to the end satisfactorily. But the charm is in the parts, not in the whole.

Le Gendre begins with one of the dialogues

which must have delighted Thackeray, and of which he himself is our best English artist. The speakers are "a man of about fifty-five years old, possessing an amiable countenance and wearing a loose suit, and a lady about ten years younger, of very smart appearance and dress." The conversation enlightens us at once as to their relation. They are man and wife, and the wife is very much the better man. Their daughter Adolphine has been married some six months, the two happy families are living together near Meudon, and of the joint household there is no doubt who is chief. At the moment when the story opens, Madame Bailleul, the mother-in-law, is demanding from her husband the formidable sum of ten thousand francs. It is to be invested in a company for the building of steamboats whose boilers can by no possibility burst; and the promoter of this promising enterprise is a certain M. Gustave Laboissière, who is the friend of the house in a very intimate sense. M. Bailleul has not yet paid over his daughter's dowry, and he is anxious to do so instead of investing in the tempting boats. But when he wishes one thing and his wife another, it is needless to say which prevails. It is settled that Laboissière, who happens to be coming to dinner, shall have his money.

In the course, however, of the conversation, the excellent Bailleul expresses a fear that Laboissière comes too often for Adolphine's peace of mind and

the welfare of his son-in-law, Chaudieu. His wife at first treats this suggestion very lightly, but as he brings forward CHARLES DE BERNARD. something like proof, she becomes violently angry. The suspected pair are in the garden. She hides herself behind the arbour in which they are sitting, and is rewarded by hearing not merely an assignation, but certain remarks about herself which nearly carry her off in an apoplexy. All this time no one has troubled himself about the master of the house. At length, when the four other actors have assembled, Madame Bailleul concealing her rage by a violent effort, Laboissière remembers that he has been entrusted with a letter for Chaudieu. They go to seek him, and he is found engaged in the innocent occupation of painting the trellis-work for his vines.

The appearance of Adolphine's husband corresponded well enough with the rustic simplicity of his employment. He was a young man of about eight-and-twenty, tall and strongly built, but this was all that could be said for his personal charms. His face gave evidence of good health and a quiet conscience, but the features could not be called either regular or remarkable. . . . As they came near the painter, our four personages appeared to experience a sarcastic feeling to which they did not give utterance, but which their countenances in different ways clearly expressed. Laboissière smiled sneeringly. M. Bailleul shrugged his shoulders in an irritated manner. Adolphine gave one of those half-sighing yawns which the presence of a husband sometimes provokes in lovely woman; and as for Madame Bailleul, after looking for a minute at her son-in-law, as if she expected the ladder to collapse under her gaze, she cried in her sharpest tones, "I suppose you are joking.

You must have seen us." Chaudieu turned his head and contemplated the group beneath him. "How

CHARLES do you do?" said he, and continued his DE BERNARD. work. "Don't you see M. Laboissière?"

said his mother-in-law in a tone which was equivalent to "Come down at once, sir."—"Oh, he does not expect me to treat him as a stranger, and he will let me finish my work."—"Certainly," said Laboissière, "artists must not be disturbed. That is a fresco, I suppose?"—"Come down, Chaudieu," said M. Bailleul, "he has a letter for you."—"From Marseilles," added Laboissière, taking it from his pocket. "Ah," said Adolphe's husband, "from Marseilles? And it is you who bring it me?"

He puts the letter in his pocket without opening it, saying that he knows its contents, and, still in character, carries off his wife's lover "to see the asparagus," which Laboissière duly praises. After dinner the investment question, upon which it is necessary to consult Chaudieu, comes up again, and to his father-in-law's intense surprise, he not only consents to the postponement of the payment of the dowry, but expresses himself willing to invest a much more considerable sum in the inexplosive boats himself. Laboissière is nearly beside himself with joy at the combined prospect of his assignation with the wife, and his windfall from the husband.

As to the first point, however, he has counted without his host. When the occupants of the Meudon villa separate for the night, Madame Bailleul summons her daughter from her room, locks her in her own, and goes to meet the Lovelace. As the chapter of accidents will have it,

her son-in-law wishes to speak to her about the investment, and about certain intentions of his respecting it. Naturally CHARLES DE BERNARD. he does not find her in her room, and fancying that she may be with his wife, proceeds thither. But before he opens the door he hears voices, not his wife's, but Laboissière's and his mother-in-law's. Such a mystery excuses eavesdropping, and Chaudieu listens with great coolness to the whole conversation.

The tenor of the interview may be guessed. Laboissière, in his double character of swindler and lady-killer, has paid his addresses to the mother as well as to the daughter. He has, moreover, a complete hold on the former in the shape of some compromising letters, and he is thus enabled to brazen the matter out, and to defeat not merely Madame Bailleul's interference with his projects on Adolphine, but also all hope of preventing the investment from taking place. He departs threatening and mocking her. Next morning, after much thought, she sends for her son-in-law, and endeavours to persuade him—of course without giving details—that she has been insulted. The scene is worth translation.—

"I wish to speak to you on a very serious matter," said she, "but first of all promise me on your honour not to tell any one what I say, not any one, mind, not even your wife."—"You need not tell me that. I know that one should only tell women secrets that one wishes not to be kept," replied Chaudieu. "Is that your principle?" said Adolphine's mother, surprised at the reply which accorded

so little with the easy-going conjugal habits of her son-in-law. "It is a Breton proverb," said he,

CHARLES and his sunburnt countenance assumed an air of cool resolution which rather startled DE BERNARD. Madame Bailleul. She seemed to make a fresh acquaintance with her son-in-law, and she augured well of it for the task with which she wished to charge him. "Listen to me," she said solemnly, "and weigh my words well. While your mother lived, if any one should have insulted her would you not have defended her? Would you not have employed all the strength and courage which Heaven has given you to protect and avenge her?"—"I should have done my duty," said Chaudieu. "You have had the misfortune," continued she tenderly, "to lose your mother, but your marriage has given you another who, without affecting to equal the lost, tries at least to take her place as much as she can, by virtue of the sincere affection she bears you." Chaudieu looked at his mother-in-law, as if to say, "I really did not know that you were so fond of me." Then he bowed without speaking. "After the ties of blood which count first," continued Madame Bailleul, who was becoming quite eloquent, "are there ties more sacred than those which come from a happy and honourable alliance? My husband and I look upon you as a son, and I am sure that at need you would discharge the duties which that title imposes."—"I hope so," said Chaudieu modestly. "For my part," said she, "I am sure of it, for you are a man of honour, a man of spirit, a true Breton. That is enough." The true Breton received this compliment with a second bow as silent and as ambiguous as the first. "If then I were to say to you, a man has insulted me gravely, deeply, mortally. He is my enemy, I have everything to fear from him, my husband is an old man, I am but a woman, and have no son, you alone can defend me, and from you alone I expect protection; what would you do? Tell me."

Benedict Chaudieu directed his gaze towards the ceiling. He crossed his hands on his waistcoat, and slowly twirled his thumbs. "What should I do?" said he in a meditative

tone, after a moment's reflection. "Really I am not sure. It seems to me that you should tell me what you wish me to do."—"What!" cried Madame Bailleul, who had been considerably fidgeted by her son-in-law's very unchivalrous gestures.

"You are a man, and you do not know how to answer such a question? I tell you of an unpardonable insult, of a serious danger, of a question of life and death, and you ask what is to be done! You cannot mean it, or rather you cannot have understood me."—"Perhaps not," said Chaudieu with the greatest coolness. "We Bretons are capital fellows, as you were kind enough just now to remark, but we are accused of having rather thick heads, and in this respect I am strictly true to my country. If you would speak a little more clearly perhaps I should be able to understand you."—"If a man gave you a box on the ear," said Adolphine's mother shortly, "what should you do?"—"Give him two," replied the Breton. "You would challenge the man who had struck you? Well, I have just shown you that in virtue of the ties which bind us, your honour and mine are one. You are insulted in my person. Do you understand now?"—"I think," said Chaudieu, "I begin to guess. You want me to fight. I have something to say about that though."—"I am listening," said Madame Bailleul, whose countenance grew dark. "About two months ago," continued Chaudieu quite coolly, "we were in the drawing-room, you and I and my wife. I was on the sofa, and you thought me asleep; you two were talking near the piano. You said to Adolphine, 'You say your husband is dull and unlovable. That is true; but on the other hand he has neither energy, will, nor character, and that is the main point. You can mould him like wax. A fool that one can lead by the nose is better than a fine talker who is master.'"—"I did not say that," interrupted Madame Bailleul, blushing to the eyes. "Excuse me, you did. Now it follows from your words that I am a man of no energy or character, and therefore you must pardon me if I am surprised at your proposing to me a course of conduct which requires both." Madame Bailleul bit her lips and

inwardly cursed her imprudence. "An evasion is not an answer," said she at length. "If you wish

CHARLES for an answer," said Chaudieu, quite unmoved,
DE BERNARD. "here it is. It is five months since my marriage, and during that time I have accepted the position you assigned me. I should have liked to be master in my own house, but you thought that would be a bad precedent. My wife leads me, according to your advice; you on your part lead my wife, so that you are in fact the mistress. I scarcely dare to ask a friend to dinner, my servants look to you before obeying the orders I give them, the house and the garden are turned upside down without my being consulted: in short, I am nobody. I do not complain. But, as I pay the fees, I think it is fair that I should have the privileges. If I were the master of the house and the head of the family, and you came to me and said, 'Son-in-law, such and such a thing has happened, which is a man's business,' I should say, 'That is for me to look to,' and I should act accordingly. But if the petticoat does the governing, let the petticoat do the fighting. I wash my hands of it."—"How well I judged you!" cried Madame Bailleul. "You are exactly the mean and vulgar creature I thought you at first."—"In short," said he, "a second edition of M. Bailleul, am I not?"—"Leave the room, sir!" cried she, her eyes blazing with anger. "I do not allow your father-in-law to be insulted in my presence." Chaudieu bowed for the third time. "You have nothing else to say?" said he with the imperturbable coolness which redoubled his companion's irritation. "Fool and coward!" she muttered between her teeth, but audibly enough. "The two things often go together," remarked the young man as he went out; "so do old woman and coquette."

But the experienced reader has no fear that the Breton is going to leave Laboissière unpunished for his misdeeds, committed and intended. After quitting his irate mother-in-law, Chaudieu

makes an excellent breakfast, and then sets out for Paris, first inducing his father-in-law to assign to him, on account of ^{CHARLES DE BERNARD.} Adolphine's dowry, the ten thousand francs worth of shares in the inexplusive boats, which have been already taken. Then follows a grand scene with the swindler, too long, unfortunately, for quotation. Armed with a forged bill of Laboissière's—the very document contained in the letter from Marseilles—he extracts from him not merely the money's worth of the worthless shares, but also Madame Bailleul's letters, of the existence of which his nocturnal eavesdropping has informed him. Laboissière, seeing the bill burnt, recovers his audacity, and, being a practised duellist, challenges the Breton, who coolly refuses to fight him, and gives him proof that his own physical strength is sufficient to guard him from outrage. The baffled swindler, however, declares that he will publicly insult his conqueror at an approaching dinner at M. Bailleul's. Chaudieu, quite unmoved by this threat, returns to Meudon, and in an interview with his wife's mother, points out that he intends to be master in his own house, that he had only been waiting for complete proofs of Laboissière's guilt, and that thenceforward she has quite a different person to reckon with. At the same time, by returning to Madame Bailleul the letters unread, he binds even her to his side. Next day the final scene occurs. Laboissière, who has quite recovered his impudence,

threatens Chaudieu with personal violence before his father-in-law's guests. The Breton CHARLES DE BERNARD. collars him and administers a sound thrashing, after which he turns him out of the house, courteously entertains the guests—it is at his father-in-law's own house in Paris—and then carries off his wife triumphantly to Meudon, where he reigns supreme.

I have no hesitation in placing *Le Gendre* at the head of all novelettes of its class with which I am acquainted. The scenes to which I have referred are all equally good; and the way in which Chaudieu is made to display his real character, quite naturally and without any violent metamorphosis, is admirably managed. The particular scene in which Laboissière is forced to disgorge, has served as a model and a quarry to hundreds of novelists. Indeed, of all the numerous writers who have since embellished their works with similar descriptions, I hardly know one who is not indebted to it. Almost equally admirable, though less suited to English taste, is that in which the haughty and vindictive Madame Bailleul is subdued by the greater coolness and baseness of her scoundrelly admirer. Nothing again can surpass the touches by which good M. Bailleul is kept before us as a useful but absolutely uncomprehending witness of the surprising events which pass under his eyes.

It is not possible to give any individual notice to all Charles de Bernard's works. There is *Les*

Ailes d'Icare, which has had, like *Gerfaut*, the position of masterpiece, but of which, to my fancy, Thackeray has translated the best part. It has been noted too that some hints are taken from it for the duel in the *Shabby-genteel Story*. There is *Un Beau-père*, the drawbacks of which I have already hinted at. It is the only one of its author's books which is hardly worth reading for any but critical purposes. There is *Le Gentil-homme Campagnard*, full of the most admirable scenes, and containing character sketches enough for half a dozen novels, but perhaps too long for its central interest. Then there is *Gerfaut*, respecting which it is perhaps well to say why I differ from most of its critics. The plot is simple enough. A Parisian gentleman, of good family and literary eminence, finds himself brain-weary, and is quite gravely recommended by his medical man to fall in love as a means of acquiring intellectual freshness. He, with equal gravity, addresses himself to this laudable purpose, selects a certain Madame de Bergenheim, pursues her to her château in Alsace, and, extracting an invitation from the husband, sets to work. But in the long run the husband becomes aware of the intrigue, with tragic results to himself and his wife. The defect of the book seems to be that the author does not show us what view he takes of *Gerfaut*. It is impossible to make out whether the treatment is satiric or melodramatic. If we are really

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expected to sympathise with an outrageous coxcomb, we refuse ; if we are meant to
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DE BERNARD, laugh at him, we find little assistance
given us in doing so. It is clear that the author had not yet found his way ; though the supper scene and the drunken harangue of Marillac, Gerfaut's friend, point to that way very clearly.

In the shorter tales the reader can hardly go wrong. Whether he takes up *Le Nœud Gordien*, *Le Paravent*, *Le Paratonnerre*, or *L'Ecueil*, names which the author chose to attach to his little bundles of collected *nouvelles*, sometimes without much reason, he cannot fail to be delighted. The average length of these tales is about seventy pages, though two longer ones, *La Peau du Lion* and *La Chasse aux Amants*, make a volume between them ; and there are a few which do not exceed a dozen pages. *La Peau du Lion*, a story dealing with the unmasking of a braggart and nearly successful suitor, is one of the author's happiest efforts ; and *La Chasse aux Amants*, which describes how a menaced husband avenges himself in the most signal manner on his false friends, matches it well. Of the four stories which make up *L'Ecueil*, by far the best is *Le Gendre*, with which I have already dealt fully. *L'Innocence d'un Forçat* is tragic, and tragedy is not the author's forte. Nor is *La Cinquantaïne*, though full of wit, exempt from a certain painful impression, for the woes of a superannuated lover

are but tragi-comic after all. The tale which gives its name to *Le Paratonnerre*, as well as *Le Pied d'Argile*—the CHARLES DE BERNARD. *Bedford Row Conspiracy*—which accompanies it, is admirable ; but *La Peine du Talion* again brings in the serious element and again falls. Georges de Sordeuil, the hero, attains but to melodrama at best. *Le Nœud Gordien* contains the delicious *Femme de Quarante Ans*, where the heroine is identified by her unfortunately stereotyped habit of assigning a special star for each of her numerous adorers to remember her by. *L'Anneau d'Argent* is the most touching of all its author's sadder stories. In it a great lady, who plays at Carlism, first entraps her daughter's suitor into the ranks of the Vendean insurgents, and then hands the girl over to a wealthy supporter of Louis Philippe. *Un Acte de Vertu* has had the honour of being in part translated by Thackeray. Its end, however, does not quite satisfy the expectations which the beginning excites. *Le Persécuteur* (which the author dramatised) is the most powerful of his tragic efforts, but not the most agreeable. Lastly, there is the *Paravent*, to some of the contents of which I may have occasion to allude presently. The best thing in it, however, must be here mentioned. This is *L'Arbre de la Science*, a story having some points of resemblance with *La Chasse aux Amants*. The hero, a lady-killer on the turn, takes in hand, for his own purposes, a youthful but innocent husband. He

hopes, by introducing him to the world and its ways, to facilitate his projects. The result is just the reverse. The pupil improves so rapidly that he very soon divines his tutor's intention, while at the same time the tottering fidelity of his wife is established firmly by her admiration for his newly-acquired accomplishments and graces, so that the seducer is beaten completely, and has to retire in considerable disorder.

I have given this catalogue of the contents of these volumes because, as their general titles give no indication, it is not very easy without something of the kind to find the volume in which a particular story is contained. No critic, nor even, I should suppose, the most uncritical reader, has failed to notice the success with which Charles de Bernard introduces people of rank and breeding into his stories. Whether or not he drew from nature, his portraits of this kind are exquisitely natural and easy. I shall not insult the admirers of Balzac by drawing the parallel which many commentators have busied themselves to draw. It is sufficient to say that Charles de Bernard is the literary Sir Joshua of the post-revolution vicomte and marquise. We can see that his portraits are faithful; we must feel that they are at the same time charming. If he has one talent greater than another in this direction, it is in drawing old men. His returned emigrants, who unite a profound conviction of the deterioration of

youth, and a half melancholy, half satirical remembrance of their past joys and prowess, with a charming good nature, ^{CHARLES DE BERNARD.} and an admirable skill in diplomacy, are among the most delightful characters in fiction. In the portrayal of his younger men, the author has been, if not less successful, at any rate less attractive, and the reason of this is a curious study in manners, if not in morals. He has, and in the main justly, the reputation of drawing ladies and gentlemen. But his gentlemen, if not his ladies, come short of the mark in one curious point of honour. They are a great deal too unscrupulous in their manœuvres. This is not a piece of insular squeamishness; for it seems to have struck French critics almost as strongly as it strikes an Englishman. Nor can it be defended by the excuse as to pranks which only deserve "peals of elvish laughter." Too many of Charles de Bernard's heroes do things at which, by convention of elf-land, even elves have no right to indulge in laughing. They do not wait till their friends have, in the accepted manner, declared war against the human race by becoming husbands. They apply the licenses of the state of war to what ought to be the state of peace. We laugh so much at the *Paratonnerre*, and the unlucky hero has his own coxcombry so much to blame for his unpleasant predicament, that we can hardly blame the friend who makes such unscrupulous use of him. But in *La Rose*

Jaune, the construction which Dramond puts on the duties of ambassador, is a little disturbing to one's ideas of the conduct of a gentleman. After all, however, there are not many instances of this shortcoming, and in those which do show themselves, there is no great harm done. It is, moreover, an interesting survival of the old Gallic spirit of sacrificing everything for the jest's sake, and of relying for a moral on the lesson given to the dupe not to be caught again. It must also be admitted that the victims have generally exposed themselves to ill-treatment by some folly or worse, and they therefore deserve their punishment, even if the executioners are not quite the right people to administer it, and if the punishment itself be not exactly according to our notions of propriety. The older tale-tellers were extremely fond of proceeding on this method, and they sometimes carried it, as in the fabliau of *The Priest and the Knight*, to rather appalling extremes.

Criticism on a novelist of this class must always in the long run resolve itself into a simple recommendation to read him. He has no unusual savour which requires preparation or encouragement before it can be enjoyed, no far-sought sentiment and interest which have to be brought near, no eccentricity of plot or style which might require interpretation or excuse. No one need bring anything to the reading of him but the faculty of perceiving a joke, and the willingness to perceive

it. He may but stand to Balzac and George Sand as champagne stands to Romanée Conti and to Château Yquem. But ^{CHARLES}_{DE BERNARD.} no one who is at all capable of enjoying him needs anything more than to have a specimen put into his hands. A reader of one volume will go on reading whenever he has an opportunity. Translation indeed is perhaps the worst means of conveying his peculiar charm. Translated he is—as Thackeray himself confesses—like decanted champagne, a monstrosity which, however, Thackeray must have lived long enough to see. Yet even decanted champagne might possibly give some, though a feeble, idea of the sapor and liveliness of the wine to persons who had never tasted it in its natural, or rather artificial, condition. These novels, well enough as they are known to professed students of French literature, have, by the mere fact of their age, rather slipped out of the list of books known to the general reader. The general reader who reads for amusement cannot possibly do better than proceed to convert his ignorance of them into knowledge.

I have not forgotten the occasion on which I made acquaintance with Charles de Bernard's books. It was in the summer of 1866, at a Breton inn, where, to pass the time, a companion of mine had borrowed an armful of light literature from the landlady. There was *Les Louves de Machecoul*, that remarkable specimen of the later

manner of Alexander the Great, when he was content to leave the work chiefly to the "young men," the possession and use of whom Thackeray affected to

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DE BERNARD.

envy him. There was *Belle - Rose*, the best imitation of his best manner by his best imitator Amédée Achard. There were wondrous works of Feydeau, who was then just arriving at the stage when Sainte-Beuve found it necessary to hide his portrait from general inspection, and a great many others the authors of which, if not the individual examples, were already familiar to me. But among these was *L'Écueil*, of whose writer at that time I knew nothing but the name. One could hardly help the exclamation, "Voici enfin de la bonne comédie" under such circumstances. Charles de Bernard has, as it seems to me, no tragic power, and wherever he attempts tragedy he comes manifestly short of himself. But in comedy proper, in the unfolding of intrigue and the portraiture of manners, he has hardly a superior except in the greatest masters. His excellence of execution is only passed by his extraordinary facility of invention. I do not know that he is a novelist who insists upon being very frequently re-read. He is too slight for that, and his speedy workmanship throws no grapnel on the memory. But the very shallowness of the impression which he makes in a manner compensates for this. One forgets the substance of his stories, and only remembers that they were extremely pleasant, so

that after a few years they can be read almost as if they had never been read before.

Their amusingness is, like the beauty ^{CHARLES}
of Mr. Browning's heroine, their sole ^{DE BERNARD.}
duty, and they certainly do it. They have, perhaps, scarcely humour in the proper sense of the word. But in wit and urbanity, and in the peculiar charm that wit and urbanity give, they are of the best French type,—of a type which has been growing rarer and rarer ever since their day. To any higher place than a place in the literature of amusement they have no claim ; but in that literature their place is very high, and from many testimonies it would seem that those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing.

VI

ALEXANDRE DUMAS¹

I HAVE heard that aggrieved authors, when they remonstrate with their critics, are wont
ALEXANDRE DUMAS. to lay great stress on the curiously dissonant utterances of the latter. "I am desirous," a person of a modest and docile temper will say, "to improve myself by attending to the dictates of my reviewers; but how am I to do so when I find A blaming me for exactly the same thing which B commends?" It is even on record that one author, inspired with a somewhat Gallic malignity, prefixed to his second work an anthology of contradictory judgments on his first, as a testimony against the injustice of critics, convinced out of their own mouth. I am not

¹ Since this essay was written a strong reaction, of which I may say without too great fatuity *pars minima fui*, has taken place in Dumas's favour. Mr. Lang, Mr. Stevenson, Mr. Walter Pollock have done him reason and justice: and the place of the very article which I notice below has been taken in a new edition by a very able and appreciative notice from the pen of Mr. W. E. Henley. Yet something like the old burden of misapprehension and misrepresentation has reappeared so lately as in the *Quarterly Review* of the year 1890.

concerned here to discuss the causes of this phenomenon. But there are probably few authors who might assemble in this ^{ALEXANDRE DUMAS.} way a body of more hopelessly irreconcilable judgments than the author of *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. Thackeray, for instance, who may be admitted to have spoken with some authority, is never weary of praising him. The *Roundabout Papers* are full of complimentary expressions to Dumas, and *On a Peal of Bells* contains a formal panegyric and apology devoted to the creator of Chicot and Dantès, D'Artagnan and Coconnas. I think, too, that it will be found that most men of letters of eminence who mention Dumas at all, mention him with a kind of affection and gratitude not dissimilar to Thackeray's. On the other hand, the general judgment is less complimentary. Most of us can remember that in our younger days he was joined with Eugène Sue—very much as if a man should join Scott and the author of the *Mysteries of London*—in a mysterious bond of moral condemnation. Afterwards it became fashionable to affect literary contempt for the author who, next to Victor Hugo, did most to stimulate, if not to exemplify, the great literary revival in France. It is almost a commonplace to speak of him as a scene-painter; nor can we greatly wonder at this, when we remember that no less considerable a man than Peacock compared the author of *Waverley* to a pantomime-writer, and even affected to consider the pantomime-writer

the more remarkable genius of the two. I turn from Peacock to a popular, and deservedly popular, book of reference, and I find under the title of Dumas that "his crisp hair and thick lips bear testimony to his African origin, a testimony confirmed by the savage voluptuousness and barbaric taste of his innumerable compositions." Before I have done questioning the relevance and civilised taste of this ethnological remark, I find that Dumas's works "are for the most part worthless, and for the most part not his," that his appearance in literature is "a portentous phenomenon," and that "the avidity with which his immoral fictions are devoured is the most severe condemnation of modern and especially French society that could well be pronounced." It must surely be worth while to examine the peculiarities of a writer whom one of the greatest of English men of letters is never tired of praising, and who appears to other persons a phenomenon only to be duly qualified by the terms portentous, immoral, and the like.

In the first place, it may be well to get out of the way the charge of issuing other men's works as his own, which is so constantly made, and which seems to prejudice Dumas so much in some English eyes. There is, of course, no doubt whatever that a large part of the enormous total of his so-called works is not his. The industry—doubtless altogether benevolent and public-spirited—of MM. Karr, Quérard, and the person who called

himself Eugène de Mirecourt, have put that matter beyond question. Nor is it worth discussing the exact morality of such a proceeding. If not unknown in England, it is not openly practised here, and is certainly not considered creditable. I think, for my part, that we are quite right in refusing it our approval. But it must be remembered that in France collaboration is much more common than here, and that collaboration glides into devilling by very easy stages. However, I am not at all careful to excuse Dumas in this matter. Much of his later work and some of his earlier is obviously not his to the most unpractised literary taster, and all such work has simply done his reputation harm instead of good. I do not suppose that anybody bases his admiration on *Le Pasteur d'Ashbourn*, which is said to be in some round-about way plagiarised from the German, or on *Madame de Chamblay*, which has the air of being, and may not impossibly be, an unsuccessful attempt of M. Octave Feuillet or some disciple of his, or on *Les Louves de Machecoul*, where the episode of Ewan of Brigglands is calmly translated verbatim from *Rob Roy*. But the assailants of Dumas have gone further. They declare that even his most famous works, the D'Artagnan series and the like, are the work of devils. They go further still, and give us the names of the devils themselves.

But this proceeding has given occasion to an

answer which has never been fairly rebutted.

Many if not the most of these inferior

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spirits have done work independently,

and that work has been absolutely

different in character, if not in merit, from *Les*

Trois Mousquetaires and *La Reine Margot*.

Chief among the earlier aides-de-camp is

ranked the late M. Auguste Maquet, who is

even said, if I mistake not, to have written

the *Three Musketeers*. No devotee of 1830,

as I frankly profess myself to be, can think

of speaking disrespectfully of M. Maquet. His

delightful pseudonym, Augustus MacKeat, adopted

to show his horror of classicism and his admira-

tion for English literature, must conciliate every

Englishman. With Philothée O'Neddy and that

compagnon miraculeux Jules Vabre, whose fame as

an author rests on the unpublished *Essai sur*

l'Incommodité des Commodes, and whom Théophile

Gautier last saw in England intent upon translat-

ing Shakespeare on the spot, M. Maquet composes

the fine flower and unforgettable trinity of the

second early romantics. But I am not aware that

any one has claimed for M. Maquet's original

work, which is tolerably voluminous, any share of

the merits of the books which he is said to have

devilled, though his theatrical powers were well

spoken of. Again, M. Octave Feuillet was one of

the "young men." Does any reader of *Bellah* or

Onesta see, in either of those works, possibilities

of the scene under the scaffold in *Vingt Ans Après*,

or the transports of Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers over the heads of Coconas and La Mole? M. Fiorentino ALEXANDRE DUMAS. is another name cited. Do his feuil-

letons, good as they were, suggest many memories to the reader of Dumas? We might go through all these writers with the same result. Either their genius failed them utterly when they began to sign their own names, or it completely changed its character, or else Dumas must have had some mysterious power of animating and inspiring his subordinates, which is to me quite as remarkable and quite as interesting as the power of actual composition.

The excellent historian of French literature, M. Gérúzez, has a remark which I have always felt inclined to quote to all separatists, critics of internal evidence, and such like folk. "La critique érúдите," says M. Gérúzez, "se propose d'enlever à Chrétien de Troyes le *Perceval*. Nous verrons bien. S'il doit être dépossédé, nous aurons à louer un autre poète qui sera de son école et son égal." This is very much the case with Dumas. No one who has any literary palate can fail to perceive in the best of the works attributed to him a unity and a peculiarity of savour which cannot be mistaken. This savour has not been shown to be the property of any other man, though perhaps it is not his. If it be not, there is another unnamed novelist who possesses the charm. For the present we shall call this novelist by the only name known, that of

Alexandre Dumas, and busy ourselves with his characteristics only. Whether he be identical or not with the person who in the flesh made forty thousand pounds in a single year, who followed Garibaldi about, and whose physical peculiarities so distressed the sensitive encyclopædist I have quoted, is a question that concerns a school of criticism to which I do not pretend to belong.

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The principles and characteristics of Dumas's *faire* are not very difficult to discover, though they are by no means so simple and inartistic as it suits the upholders of the scene-painting theory to maintain. In his better work he prefers, though he does not invariably choose, a tolerably stout canvas of history, memoirs, and the like. Without such writers as l'Estoile, Tallemant des Réaux, Brantôme, Madame de Motteville, he would, it may freely be acknowledged, be very badly off: perhaps he would not be very well off without the help of more modern commentators and servers-up of such books. Sometimes (it must also be admitted) the canvas shows through, and then the book, as in the case of parts of *Isabeau de Bavière*, is a failure. But generally the borrowed material is so skilfully worked up and covered over, that it is legitimately made the borrower's own property. In doing this he uses, of course, the four instruments which every novelist must use—plot, character, description, and dialogue. But there is no comparison between the proportions in which he

employs these instruments and the success which attends their employment. For a novelist who is so prodigal of in-
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cident, Dumas is remarkably indifferent to a regular or cunningly entangled plot. In many of his works, indeed, there is really no particular reason why they should begin or end at the precise points of their beginning and ending. They are emphatically chronicles, slices from the history of the world or of certain individuals, the dimensions of which are determined merely by the arbitrary will of the carver. This is why they lend themselves so admirably to continuations, and why Dumas is one of the very few writers whose second parts do not disappoint us. It is true that in many of his books there is a central incident of some sort, but its development often bears no proportion to the extraneous matter introduced. What, for instance, is the central interest of *Les Trois Mousquetaires*? The quest for the diamonds? It finishes too soon. The wrath and discomfiture of Milady? It does not begin till too late. What is the central interest of *Vingt Ans Après*? The attempt to rescue Charles I. perhaps, but yet this occupies but a very small part of the book. In *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* there are two distinct themes—the restoration of Charles II and the winning of Belleisle for Louis XIV—and the two might well have made two separate books. *La Dame de Monsoreau* has indeed an unusually regular plot; but its sequel, *Les Quarante-cinq*,

though it contains some of the very best scenes of the master, is one of the most promiscuous of books, and the Forty-five themselves play a very subordinate part as compared with the ruses and adventures of Chicot, and the requital of the Duke of Anjou. The authorities at the disposal of the author, or his own fertile imagination, usually supply him with an inexhaustible store of moving incidents, and these he connects together as well as may be by the expedient of making the same personages figure in all or most of them. Nor is he any more to be called a novelist of description than a novelist of plot. Indeed he is less abundant and less successful in this respect than almost any other writer of great volume. Little bits of description of houses, dresses, and so forth are frequent enough, and the authorities are sometimes drawn upon largely for a festival or a battle. But Dumas seems to have felt that his readers did not want elaborate set-pieces from him, but plenty of "business" and lively speech. His characters, however, are a much more curious study. Those who call his general method scene-painting, of course, call his characters lay-figures. The appellation does not do their observation much credit. Dumas is nothing so little as an analyst, and he does not attempt to give us complicated or intricate studies of character, yet his men and women are curiously adapted to their purpose and curiously lifelike of their kind. They are naturally types

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rather than individuals, and types of a somewhat loose and vague order, but still there is an amount of individuality ALEXANDRE DUMAS. about them which is very rarely found in novels of incident. No one will deny that the three, or rather four, musketeers are sustained in their contrast of dispositions throughout the score or so of volumes they occupy, with a good deal of skill. Nor are the repetitions of the types in different books merely modelled the one on the other. Chicot and D'Artagnan have remarkable points of contact, yet they are not mere duplicates. Ernauton de Carmainges is a clever variation of La Mole, rather than a mere reproduction of the character.

But it is in his dialogue that Dumas's real secret consists, and it is this which is the rosin that none of his imitators have ever succeeded in stealing, however confident they may be that they have got the fiddle. Its extraordinary volume would be the most remarkable point about it, if its goodness, considering its volume, were not equally remarkable. The rapidity of it necessarily deprives it of much literary grace, and prevents it from supplying any jewels five words long. Indeed Dumas, to recur once more to Peacock's cavillings at Scott, is one of the least quotable of writers. But still, if not quotable, his dialogue is extraordinarily readable, and carries the reader along with it in a manner hardly to be paralleled elsewhere. Dumas possesses fully the secret of

making dialogue, express action, and this is where he is supreme. His gift, however, in this respect is of the kind which is almost necessarily a snare.

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He abuses his dialogic facility constantly, and the result is the exorbitant length of some of his books. It is absolutely impossible for him to be concise. He will make a single interview extend over half a dozen chapters, and give a volume to the talk of twenty-four hours. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. That vast book contains, if not his very best, two of his best, pieces of work—the kidnapping, namely, of Monk, and the death of Porthos in the Grotto of Locmaria. But the *longueurs* of its middle, of the endless court conversations, and the conspiracies that come to nothing, are almost incredible. It is undeniable, again, that his situations have a tendency to repeat themselves, though, as in the case of his characters, the repetition is often very skillfully masked and coloured. Yet on the whole he succeeds not merely in riveting the attention of the reader, but also in securing his affection for and interest in his characters. No one has ever managed the process called “working up” better than he has. In such scenes as that where the four princes wait at Marguerite’s door, ready to assassinate La Mole, that where the powder is found in the wine-casks, that where D’Artagnan extracts the Queen and Mazarin from the clutches of the Parisians, and scores of others,

it is impossible to avert the attention when once fairly engaged, and impossible to avoid identifying oneself with the characters. That is the triumph of this sort of novel-writing.

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It may be noticed that I have hitherto taken my illustrations chiefly from the D'Artagnan series, and from that which contains *La Reine Margot*, *La Dame de Monsoreau*, and *Les Quarante-cinq*. I have done so because these six novels seem to me to be on the whole not merely the author's best, but also the most characteristic of his genius. The period which they cover seems to have had a special faculty of inspiring him, or, perhaps, we may say that it was the only one with which he was sufficiently familiar to be able to employ his method with successful effect. In those of his historical novels which are earlier in date, the elements are less happily blended. I have spoken of *Isabeau de Bavière*. Something similar may, perhaps, be said of the *Bâtard de Mauléon*. It is interesting, the story is well told, and there is certainly no lack of exciting incident. The scene indeed of Duguesclin's negotiation with Sir Hugh Calverley and the Free Companions, the battle of Najara, and other passages, are excellent. But the life is not in the characters in the same way as it is in Aramis and Porthos. One feels that the author is not so sure of his surroundings, and is chary of the little touches that make scenes and characters live. Nor do the novels whose scene is

in more modern times please me much better.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS. Almost all those of purely modern society may be swept away altogether.

Dumas had not the least power of dealing with contemporary subjects in any of the ways in which it is now possible to deal with them. His *Maître d'Armes* again, and other such things, seem to me very poor stuff. They sink mostly to the level of mere recitals, interesting simply from the actual facts they contain. Nor, yet again, has he been happier than other novelists in treating the great revolution. Of the *Collier de la Reine* I shall speak presently. But the *Chevalier de Maisonrouge* adds, to my mind, only one more to the long list of failures which might be made up of French novels having '89 and its sequel for their subjects. It would be rather interesting to discuss the causes of this failure, if they were not somewhat irrelevant to my present purpose. At present I need only repeat that the *Chevalier de Maisonrouge* is a failure. The best character in it, Lorin, the devotee of Parny, is not bad, but he is not of a kind that Dumas can really manage well.

There are, however, two novels besides the *Collier de la Reine* and *Monte Cristo*, which lie outside the limits I have drawn, and which are usually ranked among the author's masterpieces. These are *La Tulipe Noire* and the *Chevalier d'Harmental*. With respect to *La Tulipe Noire*, I am inclined to think that, charming as it is

in parts, it has been overpraised. Its complete adaptation to the needs of Mr. Podsnap's young person appears to have bribed all its critics. But it has the serious literary fault of being out of scale. The tulip-fancying and the loves of the excellent Cornelius van Baerle make a perfect subject for a really short tale of a hundred pages or so. But Dumas's unfortunate prolixity is here especially unfortunate. The tale is choked up with irrelevant matter, and spun out to an unconscionable length. But it is none the less charming, perhaps, if one consents to lay aside rule and compass, and it certainly squares but ill with the theory of the "barbaric and voluptuous" tastes of its author; while, on the other hand, the identity of touch between it and some of his most apparently dissimilar work is too remarkable to escape any competent critic. The contrast between the detestable part assigned to William the Dutchman at the beginning and his beneficence at the end, for instance, recalls most curiously the picture of Colbert, drawn in the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. *Le Chevalier d'Harmental* is a very different book. This, too, has the striking similarities to other parts of the author's work to which I have already alluded. The scene between the Duchesse du Maine and her poets reminds one at once of that between the poetical adherents of Fouquet and their master. The rather unnecessary descriptions of Madame Denis's domestic

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interior are in the style exactly of the details of the Broussel family and servants in

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Vingt Ans Après. Besides being thus closely connected with the other books,

which, as I have said, must necessarily be attributed to a single influence, *Le Chevalier d'Harmental* contains detached passages of very striking merits. *Le Capitaine Roquefinette*, the last of the descendants of Dugald Dalgetty, is a great creation, though Dumas has been extremely hard on him. There is no reason whatever why the uninteresting chevalier should have been allowed to obtain such a victory, excepting the necessity, which Alexander the Great generally recognises, of making the end of his books melancholy. The caligraphist, Buyat, is another triumph; and his incarceration in the gilded captivity of the Palais Royal is most charmingly told. The Regent Philippe, again, is excellent; and the way in which Richelieu, Saint Simon, and other historical characters are made to play their part, is most artful. Lastly, it must be remembered, in favour of the *Chevalier d'Harmental*, that it is one of the very few books of its author that has a regular plot. The Cellamare conspiracy gives just enough framework for the book, and not too much, and the episodes and digressions are scarcely disproportionate in their extent. After allowing all these merits, which can certainly not be allowed in like measure to many others of Dumas's books, it might seem only reasonable to call it his

masterpiece. Yet there is about it something wanting which is present elsewhere. The dialogue is not of the best, and the lack ^{ALEXANDRE DUMAS.} of interest which one feels in the hero is a serious drawback. For once Dumas has let himself follow Scott in the mistake of making his hero too generally faultless and lucky, and this is the cause, I think, of failure, if failure there be, in the *Chevalier d'Harmental*.

The *Collier de la Reine*, perhaps, demands a more special mention than the run of Dumas's less eminent works. With *Le Chevalier d'Harmental*, *Joseph Balsamo*, *Le Chevalier de Maison-rouge*, and so forth, it forms a series corresponding in some measure with the earlier and more successful cycles, and continuing them until the end of the last century. With *Joseph Balsamo—Mémoires d'un Médecin*—it composes, moreover, a sub-series treating of Cagliostro, a character naturally attractive to Dumas as combining the peculiarities of the successful adventurer with the suspicion of charlatanism, which, it is to be feared, was not a very great drawback in the eyes of the creator of Edmond Dantès. *Le Collier de la Reine* is one of Dumas's most popular works, but it seems to me to be very far from being one of his best. There is no single character in it of any particular excellence, and the endless scenes of intrigue between Jeanne de la Motte and the Cardinal de Rohan, between Oliva and Cagliostro, between the Queen and half a dozen different

personages, are altogether wearisome. The author has not succeeded in interesting us sufficiently to make his volume tolerable, and it is not tolerable in itself in virtue of any skill in handling the subject. This subject, moreover, is felt to be too much for Dumas. The stupendous interest of the French Revolution wants quite a different chronicler, and quite other modes of treatment. The particular episode, too, of the diamond necklace is one of those which have, in virtue of their special interest and strangeness, passed out of the class of subjects which can be successfully treated by fiction. All those who have studied the philosophy of novel-writing at all closely know that great historical events are bad subjects, or are only good subjects on one condition—a condition the steady observance of which constitutes one of the great merits of Sir Walter Scott. The central interest in all such cases must be connected with a wholly fictitious personage, or one of whom sufficiently little is known to give the romancer free play. When this condition is complied with, the actual historical events may be, and constantly have been, used with effect as aids in developing the story and working out the fortunes of the characters. Dumas himself has observed this law in his more successful efforts; he has not observed it here. If Scott, instead of writing the *Abbot* and making Catherine Seyton the heroine, had taken the court of Holyrood before the death of Darnley as his

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subject, and had made Mary his central figure, he would almost assuredly have failed.

The character of Cagliostro as here ALEXANDRE
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If, however, there is one book of Dumas's which deserves especial attention, both because of its immense popularity and because of the clearness with which it exhibits the limits of its author's powers, that book is the *Comte de Monte Cristo*. *Monte Cristo* is said to have been at its first appearance, and for some time subsequently, the most popular book in Europe.* Perhaps no novel within a given number of years had so many readers and penetrated into so many different countries. I do not know how far this popularity has been maintained, but it still remains the book with which, with the possible exception of the *Three Musketeers*, more people connect the name of Dumas than with any other of his works. How far does it deserve this popularity? The answer of most critical persons would probably be, without any intention of flippancy, As far as the end of the first volume. The Château d'If, as this section has sometimes been called, is almost faultless, and few persons can have found anything to object to in it except the rather dubious omniscience of the Abbé Faria. The style and character of the book, moreover, are so far all the author's own, and deal only with subjects which

he can well manage. From the time, however, that Dantès has discovered the treasure, the case is altered. The succeeding scenes give indeed an opportunity of portraying what Dumas has always endeavoured and loved to portray, the rise of an adventurer to supreme power and importance. Nor is there any taint of the supernatural, as in the case of Cagliostro. But, on the other hand, the scenes described and the characters attempted are scenes and characters in which the author is not himself at home, and which constantly recall to us scenes and characters in the work of other men who can manage them. Take, to begin with, Monte Cristo himself. Whether it is altogether fair for the generation which has come after him, and which he himself has helped to render *blasé* with persons of extraordinary attributes, to criticise him severely, may be answered in the negative by a fervent Alexandrian. But it cannot be denied that at the present day Edmond Dantès in his parts of Lord Wilmore, or the Abbé Busoni, or the Count, appears to some of us, who are fervent Alexandrians ourselves, a very tiresome and rather ludicrous player at providence. His use of his money seems ostentatious, and sometimes, as in the case of the horses bought from Danglars, intolerably vulgar. • His mania for theatrical peripetias—which might have resulted in the death both of Morrel and his son—is equally to be objected to, and the skimble-skamble

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stuff which so impresses his Parisian friends (for instance, in his first interview with Villèfort) is pitiable enough. In few ALEXANDRE DUMAS. of the author's books, moreover, is the abuse of over-length greater, and the complicated series of intrigues, though managed with considerable skill, wearies the reader more than it interests him. But the involuntary comparisons that one makes in reading the book are the most unfortunate. No one, for instance, who knows Gautier's literary dealings with haschish can avoid a sigh over the pages in which Franz d'Epinaÿ's very commonplace experiences of the drug are described. I am not myself among those who consider Henri de Marsay, Bixiou, Blondel, and the rest as absolutely perfect creations beyond whom the wit of man cannot go; but Châteaurenaud, Depray, the journalist Beauchamp, and others of Morcerf's set, certainly remind one but unpleasantly of Balzac's favourite cliques. The viscount himself would have been more acceptable if he had not in his excessive hospitality displayed "all the tobaccos of the known world" when he was expecting his visitors. Another point in which Dumas here fails is his description. This is, as I already said, probably his weakest point, and it is particularly noticeable in a book where description, one would have thought, was particularly in place. But the prevailing want all through is the want of a sufficient grasp of character to make scenes so familiar and

modern as those of Parisian life in the middle of the present century tolerable. The plan is the plan of Balzac, the hand is the hand of Dumas, and it is impossible that the inefficiency of the workmanship should not be felt. There is no attempt at an impression of growing horror culminating in the terrible death of Madame de Villefort and her child. The interest is frittered away in endless details and episodes. The narrow escape of Valentine, and the burglarious attempt of Caderousse, are treated at the same length and on the same scale; and, above all, the dangerous method of introducing long recitals by various characters in order to help on the movement and join the intrigue is unscrupulously resorted to. The first impulse of the reader is to wish that the five last volumes had been condensed to at most two; it is to be feared that his last is to regret that they were ever written at all.¹

There are not many writers who lend themselves less to analysis of their individual works or to extracts from them than the author of *Monte Cristo*. The episode of the bastion Saint-Gervais

¹ Here followed in the *Fortnightly Review* a long illustrative extract from *Les Quarante-Cinq*, which was necessitated by the original plan. But translations of Dumas are easily accessible, and though he is not hard to render, it is almost impossible to make extracts of moderate length which will do him justice. I once, after a discussion on the subject with two fervent devotees, came to the conclusion that about twenty pages is the minimum. I have therefore omitted the passage.

in the *Trois Mousquetaires*, unquestionably his masterpiece in its kind, would occupy considerably more space than the whole ALEXANDRE
DUMAS. of this essay. Analysis even of the concisest character of all the works published under his name would take a huge volume, and would assuredly not be worth the doing, still less worth the reading, when it was done. It has sometimes been remarked that most of the later literature of France, despite the innovations and the neglect of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, recalls some part or other of the abundant and long undiscovered wealth of its mediæval libraries. There can be little hesitation in any one who knows early French literature with what part of it to identify the novels of our author. He is the descendant of the later *trouvères* who in the fourteenth century busied themselves with filling up the gaps in the connection of the *chansons de geste*, and spinning out the already sufficient length of those epics into interminable *romans d'aventures*. These authors of thirty and fifty thousand line poems rivalled Dumas in their longwindedness, in their skilful working up and repetition of a certain limited number of motives and incidents; while as industrious completers of the *gestes*, and as rigid genealogists who discovered that there was a gap between this hero and his grandfather, and that that hero's great-uncle had been wrongfully deprived of his due celebration, they represent the

spirit which led Dumas to carry D'Artagnan and Chicot and Richelieu through dozens and scores of volumes. One could rename his novels in mediæval style with ease. *Les Trois Mousquetaires* is *La Chevalerie Artagnan*, *Vingt Ans Après* is *Les Enfances Raoul*, and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* might be either *Le Couronnement Charlon*, or, substituting thirteenth-century for seventeenth-century notions, perhaps *Le Moniage Athos*. Only Dumas has the advantage over the forgotten verse-writers, his predecessors, that he set, or helped to set, the example of a style instead of taking it up when it had been already worked to death, and the merit of knowing how to infuse into almost all his work sparks of life and touches of nature.

Whether the parallel will be completed by the utter neglect of his work after a short time we must wait to see. That much of it will go the way of all but the best fictitious literature, cannot for a moment be doubted. Whether any will survive is a question less easy to answer. The danger to which writers like Dumas are exposed, as a rule, is that there is not enough idiosyncrasy in their work to keep it fresh in men's memory. Every age, or almost every age, produces for itself specimens of the "talented improvisatore" who has energy enough to produce enormously, and originality enough to launch his work in popular favour. Every age too naturally prefers its own practitioners in this manner, because they can hit

its own tastes, and because the ephemeral adornments and fashion of their work are such as it understands and appreciates. The next age has no such inducements to read work of little permanent literary value. That Dumas is one of the princes of all such improvising writers I have no doubt whatever, and that he possesses the element of something far better than improvisation must I think be evident to careful readers of him.

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In order to estimate his deficiencies and at the same time the merits which accompany them, I do not know a more curious exercise than the comparison of one of these books, say *La Reine Margot* or the *Mousquetaires*, with Gautier's *Capitaine Fracasse*. They are in intention exactly similar. But Gautier had one thing which Dumas had not, an incomparable literary faculty; and Dumas had what Gautier had not, the knowledge how to engineer a novel. The consequence is that, while *Le Capitaine Fracasse* is a magnificent piece of writing, it is only a second-rate story, and that *La Reine Margot*, though offering no special quotations or passages to the memory, is a book which it is impossible to put down till you have finished it. Such things as the Château de la Misère, as the description of the swordsman's garret and his tavern haunt, and above all as the wonderful duel between Lampourde and Sigognac, Dumas was utterly incapable of writing. He

never wrote positively badly, but his writing never attracts admiration for itself.

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It is not negligent, but on the other hand it is not careful. The first word that comes into his head is used. Probably it is not a bad word, and serves very well to convey the impression intended. But of art, of careful choice, of laborious adaptation of words and phrases and paragraphs, there is none. It is even capable of being argued whether, consistently with his peculiar plan and object, there could have been or ought to have been any. The presence in a novel of incident of passages of the highest literary value may be plausibly contended to be a mistake, as well as an unnecessary extravagance. When the palate is tempted to linger over individual pages, to savour them slowly, and to dwell on the flavour, the continuity of interest of the story proper runs a danger of being broken. On the other hand, if the interest be strong enough to induce rapid reading, it is impossible to do justice to the vintage that is set before one. It is not, therefore, either by accident or from incapacity that the great masters of style in fictitious writing, like Merimée and Gautier, have usually preferred to write short stories. It is rather from a sense of incongruity. A story that takes at shortest half an hour to read may, without wearying the appetite for it as a story, have a couple of hours spent upon it. But supposing that the time necessary to read *Les Trois*

Mousquetaires is half a day, no one who has this appetite at all will consent to spend three days over it. Nor again ALEXANDRE DUMAS. in such a story is it possible, as it is with one of a different kind, to read first for the story and afterwards for the style. A novel of incident that allows itself to be treated in this way is a bad novel of incident, and if it be good it must be read just as rapidly the seventh time as it is the first.

There are two classes of persons to whom I cannot hope that my estimate of the novelist who has had most readers during the last half-century of any writer in Europe will be satisfactory. The first is made up of those whose critical method consists in invariably requiring of one class of writer the notes of another; in demanding that a poet shall choose his subjects on the principles of a preacher; that a novelist's works shall be suitable for delivery in the schools; that a historian shall chime in with their tastes and sympathies; that, in his estimate of facts, a man devoted to one science shall say nothing which disagrees with the prevalent ideas among the followers of another. For my part I prefer to judge a poet as a poet, a novelist according to the requirements of novel-composition, a theologian as a theologian, and a man of science according to the laws of his own pursuit. There is, however, a second way of judging, which is almost equally if not so glaringly unreasonable, and there are

more practitioners of it in novel-criticism than in any other division of critical practice.

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These are the people who, as it has been said, "find fault with Onestar because he is not brilliant like Twostars, pathetic like Threestars, philosophical like Fourstars;" who concentrate their attention upon what he has not said and done rather than on what he has; and who forget that in no class of composition is the field so wide, in none are the crops to be cultivated so various, and in none is partial excellence more to be looked to, and universal success less to be required. Such people ask Gautier for a series of moral tales, Flaubert for a harmony in rose-pink and sky-blue, Sandeau for a sensational novel, Charles de Bernard for a study in Parisian back slums, Murger for silver fork details and accurate acquaintance with the ways of high life. Each of these writers has some special subject or style in which he is remarkable, and this is what, as it seems to me, the critic has chiefly to look to. In the same way Dumas has the faculty, as no other novelist has, of presenting rapid and brilliant dioramas of the picturesque aspects of history, animating them with really human if not very intricately analysed passion, and connecting them with dialogue matchless of its kind. He cannot as a rule do much more than this, and to ask him for anything more is unreasonable, though in rare passages he rises to a much greater height. But he will absorb

your attention and rest you from care and worry as hardly any other novelist will, and unlike most novelists of his class, his pictures, at least the best of them, do not lose their virtue by rebeholding. I at least find the *Three Musketeers* not less but more effectual for its purpose than I found it thirty, twenty, ten, even five years ago, and I think there must be something more in work of such a virtue than mere scene-painting for a background and mere lay-figures for actors.

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VII

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

MANY years ago it happened that I was asked by an ancient lawyer, whose years, gravity, and possession of the right of moral judgment which fathership of a family bestows were unquestionable, to lend him Gautier's most famous novel. When the volume was returned, it was with the commendation, "It is a most beautiful book." I was pleased with the words—in the first place, because they were different from the usual banal expression of satisfaction with a novel; and secondly, because the verdict is the exact verdict which properly describes the character, according to my judgment, not merely of this particular book, but also of almost all the better works of its author. The extraordinary feeling and affection for beauty—physical and tangible beauty, perhaps, first of all, but also most truly beauty of the intellectual, ideal, and even moral order—which distinguishes Gautier, can hardly escape even the least critically

disposed reader ; and the marvellous way in which this worship colours his work, and animates it as if by reflection, is as THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. little to be missed. There is not one of the hundred different forms of literature which he practised in which it does not appear : poems, novels, criticisms of art and letters, travels, biographies, even the merest newspaper articles, which are articles and nothing more, are informed and saturated with it. The 'over-leniency with which he has been charged as a reviewer, by those who deem a critic to be nothing if not a devil's advocate, has no other source than this. The smallest spark of the divine spirit, the merest flash of sonnet or stanza, never escaped him ; and he had no care to comment on the pages whence beauty was absent, if only he could find some lines in which it was present. So with his travels. Recognition of the beautiful in Spain or Turkey might not be strange, but nothing could well be more abhorrent to a Gascon and a poet than the Bloomsbury districts of London, and indeed the general aspect of this city, forty years ago ; yet Gautier manages somehow to give a pleasant impression of it. He expatiates on the beauties of that London haze which not one Londoner in a thousand ever thinks of ; he gives us credit for the antique effect of our old buildings—few enough, Heaven knows ; and he can see, what some of us think no little of themselves for having independently discovered, that Waterloo Bridge is,

or rather was, one of the finest of all actual and possible bridges. All this is not mere
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GAUTIER. rose-pink optimism, nor is it the paradoxical and not uncommon desire to admire what no one else has admired. It is simply the result of an infinitely happy disposition, and of a mental aptitude for unconsciously rejecting all the chaff and retaining all the grain.

The peculiarity is at least as evident in his original as in his critical and descriptive works. There is hardly any author in whose books—though we know that his press slavery weighed heavily on him, and that he was far from a fortunate man—such perpetual sunshine reigns. Even the unhappy endings are somehow or other mixed with consolation. If Madeleine de Maupin quits her lovers, it is because, like Doralice in Dryden's *Mariage à la Mode*, she knows that not to enjoy (or at least not to go on enjoying) is the only secret of continual enjoyment. If Octave de Saville's soul in *Avatar* quits his body once too often, we are made to feel the happy-release part of it more keenly than the disappointment. Even in *La Morte Amoureuse* it is doubtful whether Il Signor Romualdo's souvenirs did not console him for the pious terrors of Romuald the priest. Nowhere is there the least trace, not even in his most fantastic stories, of the love of the horrible and revolting which almost all the other early Romantics more or less intermittently display. Compare, for instance, *Les Jeune-France* with

Borel's *Champavert*. There is, almost Gautier's power in some of the tales in the latter, notably in *Dina*; but can any one THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. imagine Gautier having written it? The gratuitous and wanton horror of the thing, the careful and yet would-be *insouciant* atrocity, make it a masterpiece in its kind; but the kind, one feels, is bad. The author has not, like Baudelaire, found the beautiful in the horrible. He has fallen into the power of the spirits he has tried to conjure, and is servant instead of master. In *Les Jeune-France* there is no trace of this, and, what is more, the very immorality loses its ugliness, even at the cost sometimes of becoming almost moral for the purpose. *Celle-ci et Celle-là*, the most shocking, of all to decent proprieties, is quite paternally moral in its restoration of a prodigal, not indeed to the paths of virtue, but to the paths of amiable and comparatively harmless license. And, generally, the author's fancy for happy endings has led him into far more respectable denouements than the reconciliation of Rodolphe and Mariette. In his largest work, *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, virtue is triumphant in the most irreproachable way, and the sentiments of the hero and heroine would do honour to Amadis and Oriana, while their conduct puts that of Esplandian's too hasty parents to the blush. Than *Militona*, again, there could not possibly be a more moral story; and, with some variations, much the same may be said of *La Toison d'Or* and of *Jean et Jeannette*.

No one has ever ventured to impugn the character of *Spirite*, or of the *Roman de la Momie*; and though *Fortunio* is perhaps an exception to the general run, and is to my fancy a far more immoral, because more heartless book than the adventures of Mademoiselle de Maupin herself, it stands almost alone. Gautier is lax, but he is seldom or never heartless. The ugliness of mere libertinage has so thoroughly impressed him that he carefully eschews it, and little as he pretended to write for boys and girls, I must confess that there is hardly a book of his which does not seem to me almost of the nature of a moral tonic after a good deal of later literature, English as well as French, and especially after a course of the French novelists who have succeeded him.

In this digression, which was hardly avoidable in dealing with the author of a book which created such a scandal as *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, I have said all that is necessary on the moral aspect of Gautier, and it may be summed up to the effect that his ardent admiration for beauty preserved him from all the uglier faults of immorality, and often led him back to the accepted code, though by a somewhat roundabout way. The author of *Une Larme du Diable*, with its exquisite tenderness and respect for innocence, ought to be safe from reproach on this head. To pass once for all to the purely literary view, it is not certain, paradox as it may seem, whether this intense affection for

beauty and this rare power of disengaging it, even though the charm of Gautier's work be due thereto, have not affected THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. that work injuriously, as far as his general reputation goes. It is indisputable that his subjects are very often inferior to his treatment, and in the general estimate all doubtless does depend on the subject. His early and herculean study of style made him, almost before he came to man's estate, a perfect workman, able to treat any subject in the absolutely best manner. But the defect of being able to write beautifully about broomsticks is that broomsticks are apt to get too much written about. 'It is certainly, as has been observed, a singular thing that a man should write his best book at four-and-twenty, and thereafter go on writing for forty years, never doing bad work, rarely doing indifferent work, but also never surpassing his *début*. It would be shallow to call this idleness, and though forced occupation on 'subjects chosen rather for than by the writer may have had much, it had not everything to do with it. It was, at least partly, a natural result of the power to see and be content with seeing the beauty of everything that presents itself. If primroses were full of beauty and suggestion to everybody, nobody, it is too likely, would have taken the trouble to fetch us camellias. Gautier, like other poets, 'was *chercheur d'infini*, but his infinite lay in expression, not in invention, and he found it sufficient.

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GAUTIER. If it be thought that I am long in coming to the discussion of the proper subject of this paper—the merits of Gautier as a novelist—I must plead in excuse that it is not easy to split up his varied characters and treat them separately. His choice of literary forms, like his choice of subjects, seems to have been mainly fortuitous or compulsory. It is true that some of his best work happens to have been fiction, but yet he is not pre-eminently a novelist. He himself always wished for the title of poet as his special description, and certainly he deserved it. Unfortunately, we have no business now with that side of his talent. It has attracted less attention in England than any other, which is certainly strange, unless it be that admirers of Gautier remember the fate of the *Roi Candaule*, and are perhaps unwilling to call the public to share the delight they have themselves experienced in reading *La Chimère* and *Le Château du Souvenir*, the elegy on Clémence and *Le Thermodon*.

One at least of Gautier's characteristics as a novelist is sufficiently obvious at first sight, and it must be a dull person who requires to be told which of the four pseudonyms of the *Croix de Berny*, the novel which he wrote in conjunction with Sandeau, Méry, and Madame de Girardin, hides his authorship. Had he written novels otherwise than as Aramis wore his uniform—*par interim*—it is probable that this characteristic

would not have been so marked. But, writing as he did under the pressure of constant occupations of a different kind, it came easiest to him to rely chiefly on his unequalled faculty of description, and to neglect somewhat the elaboration of plot and character. Hence it follows that his shorter stories, which are very numerous, are in some respects better than his longer, because the rage for word-painting is kept more within bounds. *Le Roman de la Momie* is scarcely more than one long translation, into Gautier's exquisite literary language, of the results of discovery as to the manners, customs, and furniture of the ancient Egyptians. *Militona*, pretty as it is, has the faintest possible current of action, barely enough to float the author's picturesque reminiscences of bull-fights and other Spanish ways. Of *Spirite* little is likely to dwell in the memory of any but spiritualists, except the equipments of the chambers of Guy and his widow. On the other hand, the smaller stories derive from this very peculiarity great part of their charm. *La Toison d'Or* brings Antwerp before us most delightfully as a background to Gretchen and her convertite. The Pompeian properties of *Arria Marcella* could not be more skilfully disposed, and the very erudition which is somewhat tedious in the *Momie*, is delightful in *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* and *Le Roi Candaule*. Once, and once only, did the great artist in words fail utterly, if, as I suppose, dulness is failure in

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novel-writing. *La Belle Jenny* I find myself, notwithstanding a long apprenticeship to the reading of books, whatever their unliveliness, almost unable to read. But this is exceptional. No one has ever surpassed Gautier in the writing of short sketches which are half stories and half articles, such as the records of his adventures with the mummy's foot, with Alphonse Karr's opium-pipe, and with the club of seekers of an artificial paradise who consumed haschish in the Hôtel Pimodan. *Fortunio*, *Jettatura*, and *Avatar* rank about half-way between the mere sketch and the regular novel, and are all striking works. The first is worth comparing with Edgar Poe's *Domain of Arnheim* as an attempt to imagine the creation of a sort of private paradise of gorgeousness, but it has the human interest which, with all his powers, Poe seldom managed to give. The sublime and after all useless self-sacrifice of the *jettatore*, Paul d'Aspremont, crowns a most admirable arrangement of the famous Italian superstition. But I think that *Avatar* is my own favourite of the three. The idea of the interchange of the bodies and souls of two rivals in the interest of one, is a capital starting-point. The device adopted for saving the honour of the Countess Prascovie, imperilled by this exchange, is admirable in its delicacy and truth, and the duel scene is a delightful *imbroglio*. None of these indeed surpasses *La Morte Amoureuse*, with which I shall try to deal

at greater length. But that is because *La Morte Amoureuse* is simply unsurpassable.

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Of the rest there still remain to be dealt with the two long works, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. They are both remarkable books, though very differently remarkable, and the fact that the same man should have written them both, is sufficient proof in itself of his marvellous versatility. It is difficult to deal with the first in the way I have adopted in some others of these essays, not merely because of its breaches of the proprieties, but on account of the plan on which it is written. A mixture of letters and narrative, dealing almost entirely with emotions, and scarcely at all with incidents, it defies narrative analysis. It would seem that Goethe, who in many ways influenced Gautier, is responsible to some extent for its form, and perhaps for the fact that *As You Like It* plays an even more important part in it than *Hamlet* plays in *Wilhelm Meister*. No one who has read it can fail thenceforward to associate a new charm with the image of Rosalind, even though she be one of Shakespeare's most gracious creations; and this I know is a bold word. But, in truth, it is in more ways than one an unspeakable book. Those who like may point to a couple of pages of loose description at the end, a dialogue in the style of a polite *Jacques le Fataliste* in the middle, a dozen phrases of a hazardous character

scattered here and there. Diderot—no strait-laced judge—remarked long ago, and
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. truly enough, that errors of this sort punish themselves by restricting the circulation, and diminishing the chance of life of the book, or other work, that contains them. But it is not these things that the admirers of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* admire. It is the wonderful and final expression, repeated, but subtly shaded and differenced, in the three characters of Albert, Rosette, and Madeleine herself, of the aspiration which, as I have said, colours Gautier's whole work. If he, as has been justly remarked, was the priest of beauty, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is certainly one of the sacred books of the cult. The apostle to whom it was revealed was young, and perhaps he has mingled words of clay with words of gold. It would be difficult to find a Bowdler for our Madeleine, and impossible to adapt her to the use of families. But those who understand as they read, and can reject the evil and hold fast the good, who desire sometimes to retire from the meditation of the weary ways of ordinary life to the land of clear colours and stories, where there is none of this weariness, who are not to be scared by the poet's harmless puppets or tempted by his guileless baits, they at least will take her as she is and be thankful.

Thirty years passed between the appearance of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and the appearance of *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Yet the Captain was in

the order of thought the elder. In the heyday of the romantic movement, when every one hastened to print *suivant le rituel* THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. *de Renduel*, as Banville sings, the fate of the books was various. Some got themselves printed at once, and then disappeared, to be chronicled a generation later by the pious care of Charles Asselineau, the Old Mortality of Romantic literature, to be disputed when a rare copy turned up, and to be bought at a price which would have originally purchased half the impression. Others, like *Gaspard de la Nuit*, lay long in manuscript, and saw the light only when their authors had quitted it. But a still larger number never got beyond the state of titlehood and of advertisement on the backs of their more fortunate brethren. Such was Hugo's *Quiquengrogne*, such *Les Contes du Bousingo*, which was to be the united effort of the younger Hugonic Cénacle—Gérard de Nerval, Borel, and the rest. Such also for thirty long years was *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. At last the author was pressed to execute the work. He set about it, and first the introduction, *Le Château de la Misère*, and then the body of the book, were completed. It was executed strictly in the style of the date of its conception, not of that of its appearance. It is a *roman de cape et d'épée*, of the school of Dumas, but written with a pen which Dumas never wielded, and with a knowledge of the literature and style of its time to which the author

of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* could not pretend.

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GAUTIER. The temptation to the besetting sin of over-description—if sin it can be called which gives us such exquisite work—is not always resisted; but the gait of the story is lively enough, and no lack of incident can be complained of. The Baron de Sigognac, a Gascon gentleman, has succeeded to a ruined château and a vanished estate. His father, a companion of Henry IV in Henry's early and impecunious days, had finally expended the last of a fortune which successive ill-luck, as decided as that of Ravenswood or Redgauntlet, has brought to nothing. The sole remnant is the family mansion, the Château de la Misère, with its few valueless acres of demesne, in which the young baron, with his single faithful servant Pierre, his dog Miraut, and his cat Beelzebub, vegetate rather than live. The description of the castle is a marvel. Judged, perhaps—as in one's own despite one must judge it—from the novel-critic's standpoint, it is doubtless a fault in composition to expend thirty pages on a merely preliminary sketch. But in itself it is perfect. Even Hood's *Hunted House*, one of the least generally valued masterpieces of English literature, is scarcely to be compared with it. The gradual but hopeless dilapidation of the building, the age, uselessness, and misery of the dependents—in sketching whom Gautier's love for cats and dogs has found almost as vivid expression as in his *Ménagerie Intime*

and in the *Tableaux de Siège*—the ghostly presence of the family portraits, a hint perhaps from Sintram, for Gautier, like all ^{THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.} great artists, borrowed as much as he invented—the deserted garden, the empty stables, the meagre fare, all have their chasing and enshrinement in his imperishable language. The influence which wakes up this Dolorous Gard and sleeping castle is an odd one. A company of strolling players pass the castle, and their waggon breaks down. Each member of the *troupe* has his description: the pedant, the tyrant, the *jeune premier*, the Scapin, the Bobadil, the *soubrette*—a *soubrette*, by the way, of the earliest, for his gracious Majesty Louis XIII had been long on the throne when Pierre Corneille substituted her for the duenna in stock-pieces—the chief heroine, the *ingénue*, the duenna herself, are all elaborately painted. As he entertains these strange guests, or rather as they entertain him (for the larder of Castle Sigognac is not calculated for a dozen hungry and sudden visitors), the thought strikes the baron that he will join the *troupe*, at any rate as a means of reaching Paris, the only place to mend broken fortunes or make new ones. The place of poet to the company, with the duty of adjusting Hardy's pieces and such like—a task which those who have studied those triumphs of dramatic art will scarcely envy the Baron de Sigognac—is open, and the charms of Isabelle the *ingénue* settle the question. So the strangely

assorted company sets out, and before long they meet one of the provincial *noblesse*, the Marquis de Bruyères, who knows Sigognac, notwithstanding that the baron, in his pride of poverty and race, has kept aloof from his equals, and who respects his incognito, taking it merely for a method of pursuing Isabelle. The marquis—here is another reminiscence of *Wilhelm Meister*—invites the *troupe* to his château, with certain private designs on the *soubrette*, and a good deal of subordinate intrigue goes on there. But at length the journey is resumed, and is continued through much stress of weather and hard fare to Poitiers. There a halt is made, for the city is full of country society, and full houses may be expected. Meanwhile the Bobadil has died, and Sigognac takes his place with the stage name of “Le Capitaine Fracasse.” The Marquis de Bruyères, in pursuit of his beloved, comes to the town, and much interest is excited in Sigognac’s incognito, which is still assigned to the same reason. Nor is the assignment unjust, for Isabelle and the baron have become altogether devoted to one another, though with a perfectly pure affection; the lady being virtue incarnate and having some left-handed strains of gentle blood in her—the gentleman having escaped the libertine complexion of his time by dint of his solitary bringing-up. But all the *noblesse* of Poitiers are not thus virtuous. A certain Duc de

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Vallombreuse becomes violently enamoured of Isabelle, and cannot believe either in her honour or in the position of Sigognac. THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

He tries at first to administer to the latter the treatment which, half a century and a century later, Voltaire and Dryden had to suffer, but Sigognac's valour, and the assistance of his stout comrades, frustrate the attempt. Then the baron has recourse to Bruyères, and forces the duke to fight him fairly. The would-be ravisher is of course discomfited, but he evidently means further mischief; and the *troupe*, who have by this time thoroughly identified their interests with Sigognac's, make for Paris. When they have arrived there, the danger soon reappears. Vallombreuse, finding that his own led captains and retainers are unequal to the task, resorts to hired bravoos to accomplish the discomfiture of Sigognac and the abduction of Isabelle. This gives occasion to chapters describing the bravoos Lampourde and Malartic, and their haunts both at home and at the tavern of the *Radis Couronné*, which yield in nothing to the *truand* chapters of *Notre Dame de Paris*, and consequently excel everything else of the same kind. Lampourde, the first swordsman of the day, is completely discomfited in single duello by Sigognac, and thenceforward, being an artist at heart, swears eternal allégiance to his conqueror. His crony, Malartic, who is entrusted with the business of abduction, is more fortunate. By a ruse he

succeeds in abstracting Isabelle from Sigognac's guardianship and conveying her to the deeply-moated fortress of Vallombreuse. But the valiant players, with the baron at their head, are soon on the track, and by the aid of a gipsy girl whom Isabelle has befriended, they reach Vallombreuse. The handy expedient of felling a tree, which drops across the moat and forms a bridge, succeeds, and for some minutes a most exciting fight follows between the defenders of innocence and the villains. The invincible Sigognac overcomes in turn Malartic and—only just in time to save Isabelle—Vallombreuse himself, when suddenly there enters an august personage and charges all to drop their daggers. This personage is no less than the father of Vallombreuse, and, as it happens, also the father of Isabelle. He treats his son with just indignation, but at the same time hints to Sigognac and his friends that though he acknowledges the justification of their actions, he can hardly forgive them his son's death, and that they had better withdraw speedily. So they retire somewhat crestfallen, the right of guardianship in Isabelle having evidently passed to her father; and Sigognac, his dream over and his heart irrecoverably lost, retires once more to the Château de la Misère. But Vallombreuse does not die, and his convalescence, without rendering him unhealthily moral, makes him determined to do justice to the gentleman whom

he has so deeply wronged. He departs on an embassy to Sigognac, after he and his father have on the one hand tested Isabelle's constancy by proposing to her the most tempting matches, and have on the other consulted the baron's Gascon pride by procuring him lucrative employment from the king. Sigognac does not want much entreating. He marries Isabelle, who has received an independent fortune from her father; and it is not till she, with Vallombreuse's help, and unknown to her husband, has restored Sigognac and changed the Castle of Misery to one of plenty, that she lets him revisit the place. But Gautier could not lose an opportunity of giving one of his characteristic touches. The old cat Beelzebub dies half of indigestion and half of joy at beholding his master once more, and as Sigognac insists on burying his favourite in the garden, he uncovers the buried treasure of the last of his prosperous ancestors. The members of the *troupe* are accommodated with suitable places in the household of the baron, now become a great man—the colonel of a regiment and the governor of his province; and so finishes in peace and plenty the history of *Le Capitaine Fracasse*.

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As a contrast to this rapid narrative sketch, I shall now give a translation as nearly as possible *in extenso* of *La Morte Amoureuse*, unquestionably the finest of Gautier's minor tales. It is with

reluctance that I attempt to curtail it in any way, for it is a story which one can hardly touch without spoiling, but the necessities of space make some omissions unavoidable¹—

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You ask me, my brother, if I have ever loved. I answer "Yes." But it is a wild and terrible story, a memory whose ashes, with all my sixty-six years, I hardly dare to disturb. To you I can refuse nothing, but I would not tell the tale to a less experienced soul. The facts are so strange that I myself cannot believe in their actual occurrence. For three years I was the victim of a diabolical delusion, and every night—God grant it was a dream—I, a poor country priest, led the life of the lost, the life of the worldling and the *débauché*. A single chance of too great complacency went near to destroy my soul; but at last, with God's aid and my patron saint's, I exorcised the evil spirit which had gained possession of me. Till then my life was double, and the counterpart by night was utterly different from the life by day. By day I was a priest of the Lord, pure, and busied with holy things. By night, no sooner had I closed my eyes than I became a youthful gallant, critical in women, dogs, and horses, prompt with dice and bottle, free of hand and tongue; and when waking time came at dawn of day, it seemed to me as if I then fell asleep and was a priest only in dreams. From this sleep-life I have kept the memory of words and things, which recur to me against my will; and though I have never quitted the walls of my parsonage, those who hear me talk would rather think me a man of the world and of many experiences, who has entered the religious life hoping to finish in God's bosom the evening of his stormy day, than a humble seminarist, whose life has been

¹ A complete translation has appeared since by two friends of mine, Messrs. Andrew Lang and Paul Sylvester, under the title of *The Dead Leman*. Nevertheless I reprint this.

spent in an obscure parish, buried deep in woods, and far removed from the course of the world.

Yes, I have loved—as no one else has THÉOPHILE loved, with a mad and wild passion so violent GAUTIER. that I can hardly understand how it failed to break my heart.

After rapidly sketching the history of the early seminary days of the priest Romuald, his complete seclusion and ignorance of the very names almost of world and woman, the tale goes on to the day of his ordination. He is in the church, almost in a trance of religious fervour; the building itself, the gorgeously robed bishop, the stately ceremonies, seem to him a foretaste of heaven, when suddenly—

By chance I raised my head, which I had hitherto kept bowed, and saw before me, within arm's length as it seemed, but in reality at some distance and beyond the chancel rails, a woman of rare beauty and royally apparelled. At once, as it were, scales dropped from my eyes. I was in the case of a blind man whose sight is suddenly restored. The bishop, but now so dazzling to me, became dim, the tapers in their golden stands paled like the stars at morning, and darkness seemed to pervade the church. On this background of shade the lovely vision stood out like an angelic appearance, self-illuminated, and giving rather than receiving light. I dropped my eyelids, firmly resolving not again to raise them, that so I might escape the distraction of outward things, for I felt the spell more and more, and I hardly knew what I did; but a minute afterwards I again looked up, for I perceived her beauty still shining across my dropped lashes as if with prismatic glory, and encircled by the crimson halo that to the gazer surrounds the sun. How beautiful she was! Painters, when in their chase of the ideal they have followed it to the skies

and carried off therefrom the divine image of Our Lady, never drew near this fabulous reality. Nor THÉOPHILE are the poet's words more adequate than the GAUTIER. colours of the limner. She was tall and goddess-like in shape and port. Her soft fair hair rolled on either side of her temples in golden streams that crowned her as with a queen's diadem. Her forehead, white and transparent, tinged only by blue vein-stains, stretched in calm amplitude over two dark eyebrows—a contrast enhanced still further by the sea-green lustre of her glittering and unfathomable eyes. Ah, what eyes! One flash of them was enough to settle the fate of a man. Never had I seen in human eyes such life, such clearness, such ardour, such humid brilliancy; and there shot from them glances like arrows, which went straight to my heart. Whether the flame which lit them came from hell or heaven I know not, but from one or the other it came, most surely. No daughter of Eve she, but an angel or a fiend, perhaps—who knows?—something of both. The quarrelets of pearl flashed through her scarlet smile, and as her mouth moved the dimples sank and filled by turns in the blush-rose softness of her exquisite cheek. Over the even smoothness of her half-uncovered shoulders played a floating gloss as of agate, and a river of large pearls, not greatly different in hue from her neck, descended towards her breast. Now and then she raised her head with a peacock-like gesture, and sent a quiver through the ruff which enshrined her like a frame of silver filigree.

The strange vision causes on Romuald strange yet natural effects. His ardent aspiration for the priesthood changes to loathing. He even tries to renounce his vows, to answer "No" to the questions to which he should answer "Yes," and thus to comply with the apparent demand of the stranger's eyes. But he cannot. The awe of the ceremony is yet too strong on his soul, if not on

his senses and imagination ; and the fatal words are spoken, the fatal rites gone through, despite the promises of untold bliss THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. which the eyes, evermore caressing and entreating, though sadder, as the completion of the sacrifice approaches, continue to make him.

At last it was over—I was a priest. Never did face of woman wear an expression of such anguish as hers. The girl whose lover drops lifeless at her side, the mother by her dead child's cradle, Eve at the gate of paradise, the miser who finds his buried treasure replaced by a stone, the poet whose greatest work has perished in the flames, have not a more desolate air. The blood left her countenance, and it became as of marble ; her arms fell by her side, as if their muscles had become flaccid ; and she leant against a pillar, for her limbs refused to support her. As for me, with a livid face bathed as if in the dews of death, I bent my tottering steps towards the church door. The air seemed to stifle me, the vaulted roof settled on my shoulders, and on my head seemed to rest the whole crushing weight of the dome. As I was on the point of crossing the threshold a hand touched mine suddenly—a woman's hand—a touch how new to me ! It was as cold as the skin of a serpent, yet the contact burnt like the brand of a hot iron. “Unhappy wretch ! What have you done ?” she said to me in a low voice, and then disappeared in the crowd.

On the way to the seminary, whither a comrade has to support him, for his emotion is evident to all, a page, unnoticed, slips into Romuald's hand a tablet with the simple words, “Clarimonde. At the Concini Palace.” He passes some days in a state of almost delirium, now forming wild plans of escape, now shocked at his sinful desires, but

always regretting the world he has renounced, and still more Clarimonde.

THÉOPHILE
GAUTIER.

I do not know how long I remained in this condition, but as in one of my furious writhings I turned on my bed I saw the Father Serapion standing in the middle of the cell gazing steadily at me. Shame seized me, and I hid my face with my hands. "Romuald," said he, at the end of a few minutes, "something extraordinary has come on you. Your conduct is inexplicable. You, so pious, so gentle, you pace your cell like a caged beast. Take heed, my brother, of the suggestions of the evil one, for he is wroth that you have given yourself to the Lord, and lurks round you like a ravening wolf, if haply a last effort may make you his."

Then, bidding him redouble his pious exercises, he tells him that he has been presented by the bishop to a country cure, and must be ready to start on the morrow, and so leaves him. Romuald is in despair at leaving the neighbourhood of Clarimonde. But his seminarist's inexperience makes him feel more than ever the impossibility of even discovering her, and the hints of Serapion have in a manner reawakened his conscience. He departs on the morrow without protest. They quit the city, and begin to climb the hills which surround it.

At the top I turned round once more to give a last look to the place where dwelt Clarimonde. The city lay wholly in the shadow of a cloud; its blue and red roofs were blended in one general half-tint, above which here and there white flakes of the smoke of morning fires hovered. By some optical accident a single edifice stood out gilded by a ray of light, and more lofty than the mass of surrounding

buildings. Though more than a league off, it seemed close to us. The smallest details were visible—the turrets, the terraces, the windows, and THÉOPHILE even the swallow-tailed vanes. “What is GAUTIER. that sunlit palace yonder?” I asked of Serapion. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and after looking he answered, “It is the palace which Prince Concini gave to the courtesan Clarimonde. Terrible things are done there.” As he spoke, whether it were fact or fancy I know not, it seemed to me that I saw a slender white form glide out on the terrace, glitter there for a second, and then disappear. It was Clarimonde! Could she have known that at that moment, from the rugged heights of the hill which separated me from her, and which I was nevermore to descend, I was bending a restless and burning gaze on the palace of her abode, brought near me by a mocking play of light, as if to invite me to enter? Ah yes! she knew it doubtless, for her soul was bound to mine too nearly not to feel its least movements; and this it must have been which urged her to climb the terrace in the cold morning dews, wrapped only in her snowy nightgear.

But the die is cast, and the journey continues. They reach the modest parsonage where Romuald is to pass the rest of his days, and he is installed in his cure, Serapion returning to the city. Romuald attacks his work desperately, hoping to find peace there, but he very partially succeeds. The words of Clarimonde and the touch of her hand haunt him constantly, and sometimes even stranger things happen. He sees the flash of the sea-green eyes across his garden hedges; he seems to find the imprint of feet, which are assuredly not those of any inhabitant of the village, on the gravel walks. At last one

night he is summoned late to the bedside of a dying person, by a messenger of gorgeous dress and outlandish aspect.

THÉOPHILE
GAUTIER.

The journey is made in the darkness on fiery steeds, through strange scenery, and in an unknown direction. A splendid palace is at length reached—too late, for the priest is met by the news that his penitent has already expired. But he is entreated, and consents, at least to watch and pray by the body during the night. He is led into the chamber of death, and finds that the corpse is Clarimonde. At first he mechanically turns to prayer, but other thoughts inevitably occur. His eyes wander to the appearance and furniture of the boudoir suddenly put to so different use: the gorgeous hangings of crimson damask contrasting with the white shroud, the faded rose by the bedside, the scattered signs of revelry, distract and disturb him. Strange fancies come thick. The air seems other than that to which he is accustomed in such chambers of the dead. The corpse appears from time to time to make slight movements; even sighs seem to echo his own. At last he lifts the veil which covers her, and contemplates the exquisite features he had last seen at the fatal moment of his sacrifice. He cannot believe that she is dead. The faint blush-rose tints are hardly dulled, the hand is not colder than he recollects it.

The night was now far spent. I felt that the moment of eternal separation was at hand, and I could not refuse

myself the last sad pleasure of giving one kiss to the dead lips of her, who, living, had had all my love. Oh,, wonder! A faint breath mingled with THÉOPHILE mine, the eyes opened and became once GAUTIER. more brilliant. She sighed, and uncrossing her arms she clasped them round my neck with an air of ineffable contentment. "Ah!" she said, with a voice as faint and as sweet as the last dying vibrations of a harp, "is it you, Romuald? I have waited for you so long that now I am dead. But we are betrothed to one another from this moment, and I can see you and visit you henceforward. Romuald, I loved you! Farewell; this is all I have to say; and thus I restore the life you gave me for a minute with your kiss. We shall soon meet again." Her head fell back, but she still held me encircled. A furious gust of wind forced in the window and swept into the room: the last leaflet of the white rose quivered for a minute on its stalk and then fell, and floated through the open casement, bearing with it the soul of Clarimonde. The lamp went out, and I sank in a swoon.

He wakes in his own room, and hears from his ancient *gouvernante* that the same strange escort which carried him off has brought him back. Soon afterwards his friend Serapion comes to visit him, not altogether to his delight, for he rightly suspects the father of some knowledge of his secret. Serapion announces to him as a matter of general news that the courtesan Clarimonde is dead, and mentions that strange rumours have been current respecting her—some declaring her to be a species of vampire, and her lovers to have all perished mysteriously. As he says this he watches Romuald, who cannot altogether conceal his thoughts. Thereat Serapion—

"My son," said he, "it is my duty to warn you that your feet are on the brink of an abyss; take heed of falling. Satan's hands reach far, and the grave is not always a faithful gaoler."

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER. Clarimonde's tombstone should be sealed with a triple seal, for it is not, say they, the first time she has died. May God watch over you." Saying this, Serapion slowly went out, and I saw him no more. I soon recovered completely, and returned to my usual occupations; and though I never forgot the memory of Clarimonde and the words of the father, nothing extraordinary for a time occurred to confirm in any way his ill-omened forebodings, so that I began to believe that his apprehensions and my own terror were unfounded. But one night I had a dream. Scarcely had I fallen asleep when I heard my bed-curtains drawn, the rings grating sharply on the rods. I raised myself abruptly on my elbow and saw before me the shadowy figure of a woman. At once I recognised Clarimonde. She carried in her hand a small lamp of the shape of those which are placed in tombs, and the light of it gave to her tapering fingers a rosy transparency which, with gradually fainter tints, prolonged itself till it was lost in the milky whiteness of her naked arm. The only garment she had on was the linen shroud which covered her on her death-bed, and she tried to hold up its folds on her breast as if shame-stricken at her scanty clothing. But her little hand was not equal to the task; and so white was she that the lamplight failed to make distinction between the colour of the drapery and the hue of the flesh. Wrapped in this fine tissue, she was more like an antique marble statue of a rather than a live woman. Dead or alive, woman or statue, shadow or body, her beauty was unchangeable, but the green flash of her eyes was somewhat dulled, and her mouth, so red of old, was now tinted only with a faint rose-tint like that of her cheeks. The blue flowerets in her hair were withered and had lost almost all their petals; yet she was still all charming—so charming that, despite the strangeness of the adventure and the unexplained fashion of her entrance, no thought of fear occurred to me. She placed the lamp

on the table and seated herself on the foot of my bed ; then, bending towards me, she spoke in the soft and silvery voice that I have heard from none THÉOPHILE but her. "I have kept you waiting long, dear GAUTIER.

Romuald, and you must have thought that I had forgotten you. But I come from very far—from a place whence no traveller has yet returned. There is neither sun nor moon, nor aught but space and shadow ; no road is there, nor pathway to guide the foot, nor air to uphold the wing ; and yet here am I, for love is stronger than death, and is his master at the last. Ah ! what sad faces, what sights of terror, I have met ! With what pains has my soul, regaining this world by force of will, found again my body and reinstalled itself ! With what effort have I lifted the heavy slab they laid upon me, even to the bruising of my poor feeble hands ! Kiss them, dear love, and they will be cured." She placed one by one the cold palms of her little hands against my mouth, and I kissed them again and again, while she watched me with her smile of ineffable content. I at once forgot Serapion's advice, I forgot my sacred office ; I succumbed without resistance at the first summons, I did not even attempt to repulse the tempter.

She tells him how she had dreamed of him long before she saw him ; how she had striven to prevent his sacrifice ; how she was jealous of God, whom he preferred to her ; and how, though she had forced the gates of the tomb to come to him, though he had given life back to her with a kiss, though her recovery of it has no other end than to make him happy, she herself is still miserable because she has only half his heart. In his delirium he tells her, to console her, that he loves her "as much as God."

"Instantly the glitter as of chrysoprase flashed

once more from her eyes. 'Is that true?—as much as God?' cried she, winding her arms round me. 'If 'tis so you can come with me; you can follow me whither I will.'" And fixing the next night for the rendezvous, she vanishes. He wakes, and, considering it merely a dream, resumes his pious exercises. But the next night Clarimonde, faithful to her word, reappears—no longer in ghostly attire, but radiant and splendidly dressed. She brings her lover the full costume of a cavalier, and when he has donned it they sally forth, taking first the fiery steeds of his first nocturnal adventure, then a carriage, in which he and Clarimonde, heart to heart, head on shoulder, hand in hand, journey through the night.

Never had I been so happy. For the moment I had forgotten everything, and thought no more of my priesthood than of some previous existence. From that night forward my existence was as it were doubled, and there were in me two men, strangers each to the other's existence. Sometimes I thought myself a priest who dreamt that he was a gallant, sometimes a gallant who dreamt that he was a priest. . . . I could not distinguish the reality from the illusion, and knew not which were my waking and which my sleeping moments. Two spirals, entangled without touching, form the nearest representation of this life. The young cavalier, the coxcomb, the debauchee, mocked the priest; the priest held the dissipations of the gallant in horror. Notwithstanding the strangeness of the situation, I do not think my reason was for a moment affected. The perceptions of my two existences were always firm and clear, and there was only one anomaly which I could not explain, and this was that the same unbroken sentiment of identity

subsisted in two beings so different. Of this I could give myself no explanation, whether I thought myself to be really the vicar of a poor country THÉOPHILE village, or else Il Signor Romualdo, lover in GAUTIER. possession of Clarimonde.

The place, real or apparent, of Il Signor Romualdo's sojourn with his beloved is Venice, where they inhabit a gorgeous palace, and where Romuald enters into all the follies and dissipations of the place. He is unalterably faithful to Clarimonde, and she to him ; and the time passes in a perpetual delirium. But every night—as it now seems to him—he finds himself once more a poor country priest, horrified at the misdeeds of his other personality, and seeking to atone for them by prayer and fasting and good works. Even in his Venetian moments he sometimes thinks of Serapion's words, and at length he has especial reason to remember them.

For some time Clarimonde's health had not been very good ; her complexion faded from day to day. The doctors who were called in could not discover the disease, and after useless prescriptions gave up the case. Day by day she grew paler and colder, till she was nearly as white and as corpse-like as on the famous night at the mysterious castle. I was in despair at this wasting away, but she, though touched by my sorrow, only smiled at me sweetly and sadly with the fatal smile of those who feel their death approaching. One morning I was sitting by her. In slicing some fruit it happened that I cut my finger somewhat deeply. The blood flowed in crimson streamlets, and some of it spurted on Clarimonde. Her eyes brightened at once, and over her face there passed a look of fierce joy which I had never before seen in her. She sprang from the bed with

catlike activity and pounced on the wound, which she began to suck with an air of indescribable delight, THÉOPHILE swallowing the blood in sips, slowly and carefully, as an epicure tastes a costly vintage. GAUTIER.

Her eyelids were half closed, and the pupils of her sea-green eyes flattened and became oblong instead of round. . . . From time to time she interrupted herself to kiss my hand ; then she began again to squeeze the edges of the wound with her lips in order to draw from it a few more crimson drops. When she saw that the blood ran no longer, she rose with bright and humid eyes, rosier than a May morning, her cheeks full, her hands warm yet no longer parched, fairer in short than ever, and in perfect health. "I shall not die ! I shall not die !" she said, clasping my neck in a frenzy of joy. "I can live long and love you. My life is in yours, my very existence comes from you. A few drops of your generous blood, more precious and sovereign than all the elixirs of the world, have given me back to life."

This scene gave me matter for much reflection, and put into my head some strange thoughts as to Clarimonde. That very evening, when sleep had transported me to my parsonage, I found there Father Serapion, graver and more careworn than ever. He looked at me attentively and said, "Not content with destroying your soul, are you bent also on destroying your body ? Unhappy youth, into what snares have you fallen !" The tone in which he said this struck me much at the time ; but, lively as the impression was, other thoughts soon drove it from my mind. However, one evening, with the aid of a glass, on whose tell-tale position Clarimonde had not counted, I saw her pouring a powder into the cup of spiced wine which she was wont to prepare after supper. I took the cup, and, putting it to my lips, I set it down, as if intending to finish it at leisure. But in reality I availed myself of a minute when her back was turned to empty it away, and I soon after went to bed, determined to remain awake and see what would happen. I had not long to wait. Clarimonde entered as soon as she had convinced herself that I slept. She uncovered my

arm and drew from her hair a little gold pin ; then she murmured under her breath, " Only one drop, one little crimson drop, one ruby just to tip THÉOPHILE the bodkin ! As you love me still I must not GAUTIER die. Ah, poor love ! I am going to drink his blood, his beautiful blood, so bright and so purple. Sleep, my only treasure ; sleep, my darling, my deity ; I will do you no harm ; I will only take so much of your life as I need to save my own. Did I not love you so much I might resolve to have other lovers, whose veins I could drain ; but since I have known you I hate all others. Ah, dear arm, how round it is, and how white ! How shall I ever dare to pierce the sweet blue veins ! " And while she spoke she wept, so that I felt her tears rain on the arm she held. At last she summoned courage ; she pricked me slightly with the bodkin and began to suck out the blood. But she drank only a few drops, as if she feared to exhaust me, and then carefully bound up my arm after anointing it with an unguent which closed the wound at once. I could now doubt no longer : Serapion was right. Yet, in spite of this certainty, I could not help loving Clarimonde, and I would willingly have given her all the blood whereof she had need, to sustain her artificial life. Besides, I had not much to fear ; the woman was my warrant against the vampire ; and what I had heard and seen completely reassured me. I had then well-nourished veins which were not to be soon drawn dry, nor had I reason to grudge and count their drops. I would have pierced my arm myself and bid her drink. I was careful to make not the slightest allusion to the narcotic she had given me, or to the scene that followed, and we lived in unbroken harmony. But my priestly scruples tormented me more than ever, and I knew not what new penance to invent to blunt my passion and mortify my flesh. Though my visions were wholly involuntary and my will had nothing to do with them, I shrank from touching the host with hands thus sullied and spirit defiled, by debauchery, whether in act or in dream. To avoid falling into these harassing hallucinations, I tried to prevent myself sleeping ; I held my eyelids open, and

remained in a standing posture ; striving with all my force against sleep. But soon the waves of slumber THÉOPHILE drowned my eyes, and seeing that the struggle GAUTIER. was hopeless, I let my hands drop in weariness, and was once more carried to the shores of delusion. . . . Serapion exhorted me most fervently, and never ceased reproaching me with my weakness and my lack of zeal. One day, when I had been more agitated than usual, he said to me, "There is only one way to relieve you from this haunting plague, and, though it be extreme, we must try it. Great evils need heroic remedies. I know where Clarimonde was buried ; we must disinter her, and you shall see the real state of your lady-love. You will hardly be tempted to risk your soul for a vile body, the prey of worms and ready to turn to dust. That, if anything, will restore you to yourself." For my part, I was so weary of this double life that I closed with his offer. I longed to know, once for all, which—priest or gallant—was the dupe of a delusion, and I was resolved to sacrifice one of my two lives for the good of the other—yea, if it were necessary, to sacrifice both, for such an existence as I was leading could not last. . . . Father Serapion procured a mattock, a crowbar, and a lantern, and at midnight we set out for the cemetery, whose plan and arrangements he knew well. After directing the rays of the dark lantern on the inscriptions of several graves, we came at last to a stone half buried under tall grass, and covered with moss and lichen, whereon we deciphered this epitaph, "Here lies Clarimonde, who in her lifetime was the fairest in the world." "'Tis here," said Serapion ; and, placing his lantern on the ground, he slipped the crowbar into the chinks of the slab and essayed to lift it. The stone yielded, and he set to work with the spadé. As for me, stiller and more gloomy than the night itself, I watched him at work, while he, bending over his ill-omened task, sweated and panted, his forced and heavy breath sounding like the gasps of the dying. The sight was strange, and lookers-on would rather have taken us for tomb-breakers and robbers of the dead than for God's priests. The zeal

of Serapion was of so harsh and savage a cast, that it gave him a look more of the demon than of the apostle or the angel, and his face, with its THÉOPHILE severe features deeply marked by the glimmer GAUTIER. of the lantern, was hardly reassuring. A cold sweat gathered on my limbs and my hair stood on end. In my heart I held Serapion's deed to be an abominable sacrilege, and I could have wished that a flash of lightning might issue from the womb of the heavy clouds which rolled low above our heads and burn him to ashes. The owls perched about the cypress trees, and, disturbed by the lantern, came and flapped its panes heavily with their dusty wings, the foxes barked in the distance, and a thousand sinister echoes troubled the silence. At length Serapion's spade struck the coffin with the terrible hollow sound that nothingness returns to those who intrude on it. He lifted the lid, and I saw Clarimonde, as pale as marble, and with her hands joined; there was no fold in her snow-white shroud from head to foot; at the corner of her blanched lips there shone one little rosy drop. At the sight Serapion broke into fury. "Ah! fiend, foul harlot, drinker of gold and blood, we have found you!" said he, and he scattered holy water over corpse and coffin, tracing the sign of the cross with his brush. No sooner had the blessed shower touched my Clarimonde than her fair body crumbled into dust, and became nought but a hideous mixture of ashes and half-burnt bones. "There, Signor Romuald," said the inexorable priest, pointing to the remains, "there is your mistress. Are you still tempted to escort her to the Lido or to Fusina?" I bowed my head; a mighty ruin had taken place within me. I returned to my parsonage, and Il Signor Romualdo, the lover of Clarimonde, said farewell for ever to the poor priest whose strange companion he had been so long. Only the next night I again saw Clarimonde. She said to me as at first in the church porch, "Poor wretch, what have you done? Why did you listen to that frantic priest? Were you not happy? And what harm had I done you that you should violate my grave and shamefully expose

the misery of my nothingness? Henceforward all communication between us, soul and body, is THÉOPHILE broken. Farewell, you will regret me." She GAUTIER. vanished in the air like a vapour, and I saw her no more.

Alas! she spoke too truly. I have regretted her again and again. I regret her still. The repose of my soul has indeed been dearly bought, and the love of God itself has not been too much to replace the gap left by hers. This, my brother, is the history of my youth. Never look at woman, and let your eyes as you walk be fixed upon the ground; for, pure and calm as you may be, a single moment is sufficient to make you lose your eternal peace.

I have thus endeavoured, by narrative and translation, to give some idea of the characteristics of Gautier's narrative work. Of that work as a whole it may briefly be said that many of the tales, now usually published as *nouvelles* and *romans*, are of the first order of excellence, to be read again and again; that *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, except in parts, is of the second; that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* occupies an exceptional position; and that the rest are of a decidedly lower rank. Hence, as generally happens with writers who have tried many different literary forms, it does not do to judge Gautier by his novels alone. The exquisite charm which distinguishes him is felt in them, but is not, perhaps, clearly disengaged and distinguished till his other work is compared. With an estimate of his work generally we are not now concerned. Perhaps only he himself, in such a notice as those admirable *pièces* of criticism which he has given to Heine and to

Baudelaire, could have done himself justice. He had affinities to both these writers, and also, possibly in still greater measure, to Thackeray. All four were strongly tinctured, more strongly, indeed, than any of their contemporaries, with the spirit of irony—fiercer and more tenderly pathetic in Heine, more philosophical and practical in Thackeray, sadder and less wide of view in Baudelaire, more playful in Gautier. *Spleen et idéal*, the motto which Baudelaire chose for himself, might perhaps be paralleled in Gautier's case by the alteration, *Verve et idéal*. The possession of this mixture made him a humorist—the most considerable humorist, if we stick to the proper sense of that word, that France has produced since the seventeenth century. His humour is not confined to his novels by any means, though it is abundantly present in them, and adds greatly to their charm. It is a playful variety, the very reverse of savage, and certainly partaking nothing of the grimness and melancholy which certain critics would have us associate with the quality. He constantly saw, as all ironists and humorists see, the contrast of actual and ideal; but for the most part his inexhaustible faculty of enjoyment, and the alchemy by which he could extract beauty from everything, saved him from at any rate the appearance of all but very transient fits of melancholy. He had, too, with all his pretended laziness, an unconquerable appetite for

THÉOPHILE
GAUTIER.

work, the sovereignest cordial for any tendency to pine for what is not. He says himself that he wrote some three hundred volumes; and, counting newspaper work, there can be little doubt that he did. I have already referred to most of the forms which this activity took, and nothing more remains to be noticed but his charming ballets, of which in masque days Ben Jonson would have been proud, and the mere descriptions of which (we fortunately have them from his own hand) are in themselves half-finished tales and wholly delightful works of literary art. Perhaps some of these have helped to expose him to unmerited rebukes. It has been frequently brought against him as reproach that he acquiesced in the Empire; and not over-wise things have been said about his materialism "finding its ideal in the fêtes of St. Cloud." The reproach is worse than unjust; it is unintelligent. No writer ever lived whose talent and spirit were more utterly non-political than Gautier's. He had consistently, and from the very first, declined to join in the republicanism and humanitarianism of some of his contemporaries. If he had any particular political sentiment it was a lazy hatred of what he calls, in almost his latest work, *la stupidité égalitaire*, and this feeling is to be found expressed in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* as clearly as in the *Tableaux de Siége*.

To my own mind, nothing better pictures

Gautier than the words of an early poem of his own—

Une jeune chimère aux lèvres de ma coupe, THÉOPHILE
 Dans l'orgie a donné le baiser le plus doux ; GAUTIER.
 Elle avait les yeux verts, et jusque sur sa croupe
 Ondoyait en torrent l'or de ses cheveux roux.

Des ailes d'épervier tremblaient à son épaule ;
 La voyant s'envoler je sautai sur ses reins ;
 Et faisant jusqu'à moi ployer son cou de saule,
 J'enfonçai comme un peigne une main dans ses crins.

Elle se démenait hurlante et furieuse,
 Mais en vain, je broyais ses flancs sur mes genoux ;
 Alors elle me dit d'une voix gracieuse
 Plus claire que l'argent, " Maître, où donc allons nous ? "

Par delà le soleil et par delà l'espace
 Où Dieu n'arriverait qu'après l'éternité ;
 Mais avant d'être au but ton aile sera lasse ;
 Car je veux voir mon rêve en sa réalité.

His style had all the strangeness, the charms, and the capabilities of the creature he describes, and his mastery over it is not exaggerated in the poem. Not unfrequently, too, he went a long way on his adventurous journey. But the reflection embodied in the penultimate line generally occurred to him, and then he contented himself with flights less ambitious and sometimes hardly ambitious enough.

VIII

JULES SANDEAU¹

THERE are a good many different ideas floating about English literature and English thought on the subject of French novels.

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It is sometimes held—justly enough in the main—that the superiority of workmanship which has long distinguished French literature in so many other departments marks it here also. The necessity of a beginning, middle, and end, which critics declare to be incumbent upon all works of literary art, from tragedies to leading articles, is supposed to be better recognised to the south than to the north of the Channel. In character-drawing the French are allowed to be at a certain disadvantage, from their habit of depicting types rather than individuals; but even this has its merits as assisting what Pope would have called the correctness of the total effect. Their dialogue is stiffer but more careful than that of the average English novelist, and in description they can, at the least, hold their own. People

¹ See Preface.

who take this view—professional critics for the most part—would probably say that the best English novels are superior to the best French, but that if we take the run of Mudie's shelves and compare their contents with the gray and yellow volumes of Messrs. Lévy, Plon, Hetzel, Hachette, and Charpentier, the advantage from a literary point of view is very decidedly in favour of the latter.

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This, I have said, is what may be called the professional view. The general public which reads French novels reads them mainly from a notion that they are more amusing than English fiction. Whether this is so depends a good deal on the notion of amusement entertained by the reader. On the whole, it may be suspected that it is to some extent a survival from the days of the elder Dumas and other writers, who certainly outmatched any English rivalry in their particular line. To this day Thackeray's verdict on Dumas has not been reversed by any competent judge, and no fictitious ordinary exists at which a man may satisfy his honest and uncritical hunger for mere amusement with better and more abundant food than is provided by the dozen volumes that take him from D'Artagnan's setting forth on the buttercup-coloured pony down to his death as he clutches the marshal's baton, or by the other dozen which include *La Dame de Monsoreau*, *Les Quarante-cinq*, and *La Reine Margot*. But this is only one special variety of French fiction, a variety, too, which has long ceased

to be cultivated. Those who read for the story should be fairly warned that in an average French novel of later days there is, as a rule, less of that element than in an English one, though what there is may be better managed and, to some people, of a more attractive kind.

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The last word brings us to yet a third idea about French fiction much more prevalent than either of the other two, and sometimes, it is to be feared, in the case of the graceless, responsible for the notion about amusement. It is supposed that French novels are generally, as Mr. Browning has roundly put it, "scrofulous," that they deal with subjects which to the English novelist are more or less taboo, and which, if he does deal with them, he has to handle in a very cautious and guarded manner. In short, not to waste words on a simple matter, the inevitable ingredient of love, without which a novel would not be a novel, is supposed in a French romance necessarily to take the form of adultery, practised or proposed. To hear some people talk it might be imagined that all French novels were mere sporting treatises, dealing with the lore and incidents of the *Chasse aux mariées*, and that no love which is not in the common phrase guilty has a chance with the French novelist. Moreover, as usually happens in such cases, the belief in the fact has been accompanied by all sorts of deductions and corollaries from it, and by much curious speculation as to its causes. The more ingenuous Englishman is given to

believe that the picture of family infelicity is a faithful copy of French home life, and shakes his head when better-informed persons assure him that conjugal infidelity is after all not so very much commoner, in the departments at least, than in English country life. Others addicted to "sociological" argument ask, What else can you expect when *mariages de convenance* are the rule, and when opportunities such as an English girl has of making her own choice, and of postponing that choice till she has had her fill of harmless flirtation, are unknown? Others not destitute of shrewdness (if the fact for which they endeavour to account were only a little better authenticated) point out that the catastrophe of the ideal French matron is not such a very surprising reaction from the altogether fantastic position assigned to the ideal *jeune fille*, that creature of mysterious poetical longings, of aspirations "which nobody but a mother can apprehend," and of a composition decidedly too sylph-like to reconcile herself to such a prosaic institution as marriage. The most practical and downright of the interpreters seek their explanation in certain peculiarities of the relations between French husbands and French wives, which it does not need a study of the *Physiologie du Mariage* to discover; and all alike agree that it is very sad and very shocking, and that French novels as a rule are by no means suitable companions to the bread and butter even of our tolerably emancipated

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English misses. I have already hinted that there is some slight doubt in this, as in another

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famous case, whether the fish is in fact capable of being put into the vessel without causing an overflow. But perhaps the real explanation of the literary part of the phenomenon is best found by referring to a very similar one in our own literary history. Even those who are not acquainted at first hand with the Restoration drama, know something of the four-handed duel which it excited between Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, and Macaulay. Here, as in the case before us, a form of literature which was supposed to busy itself with representing real life chose to represent this life as governed by, to say the least, a total absence of moral principle. Notwithstanding this, I do not suppose that there is very much need for the average Englishman to disturb himself with the idea that his great-grandmother's great-grandmother was no better than she should be. In neither case perhaps were actual examples of the types represented very far to seek. There were probably a good many Bellmours and Berinthias then in England, and there are doubtless a good many Fannys and Bussys now in France. But for the most part the moral atmosphere and the list of *dramatis personæ* are both as arbitrary as Charles Lamb wished to prove. The angelic and *rêveuse* maiden; the husband, sometimes brutal, sometimes merely respectable, but always indifferent to the singularly

vague desires of his spouse ; the young man who appears like a revelation of happiness to the interesting mental invalid, are all purely stock types of the kind always more common in a literature careful of form than in one careless of it, and capable of being matched with a hundred other similar types in other branches. No doubt the production of such types in literature does to a certain extent tend to reproduce them in real life, and this is what Lamb went wrong in overlooking. But to suppose that the type necessarily originated in real life, or even that it of necessity occurs largely there, is certainly a mistaken way of arguing.

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Whether, however, the prevalence of this particular variety of "scrofula" in French literature be great or small, and whatever cause we may assign for that prevalence, it is certain that the author whose name stands at the head of this article must have been very early and very effectually touched for the evil. Most of Sandeau's works, and beyond all question the best of them, do not deal with the subject of illicit love at all, and in the few that do so deal the cause of morality is as effectually served by the invariably disastrous effects made to follow on adultery, as by the total absence of anything like loose descriptions. It would be difficult to find in a score of novels and as many minor tales a single passage at which even the nice morality of Wycherley's Olivia could find an excuse to put up its virtuous

fan. Even where the love which is the basis of the story is not in accordance with law and order, there are certain marked differences in its treatment.

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The husband is hardly ever made ridiculous, and he generally has the best of the position, in fact as well as in law, a state of things which must be admitted to be a triumph no less of the author's artistic skill than of his moral principles. M. de Belnave, in *Marianna*, M. de Rouvères, in *Fernand*, are perhaps given to making too long speeches—a common and be-setting sin of Sandeau's; but they manage to get themselves remarkably well out of a position which has been the familiar hell of ridicule for no one knows how many generations. In short, this particular and awkward *pas de trois* is to Sandeau merely one among others to be treated now and then, and handled artistically when occasion serves, not an indispensable ingredient in every ballet and masque which he sets before the public. His way of regarding the sexes and their relations is, on the whole, not very different from that to which we are accustomed in English fiction, save, perhaps, that, especially in his earlier work, he is wont to be rather too Turkish in adopting the proverb, "If you set butter in the sun it will melt," and to put more strongly than strict common sense and experience require the theory of the mysterious and transcendental *besoins* of the feminine sex, and the necessity of

continually guarding it against temptation. At the same time his studies in this direction are frequently marked by great psychological knowledge and skill.

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The two novels I have just mentioned contain each some striking evidences of this. In *Fernand* there is something almost appalling in the scientific manner in which the husband chains the two culprits together by the tie of honour in the one case, of guilty affection in the other, sure that while the former holds the latter will break down under the strain, and at last avenge him doubly. In *Marianna* the steps by which the heroine, after being abandoned and argued with by her lover as to the justice and necessity of the abandonment, is at last herself brought to feel exactly the same emotion, or rather the same absence of it, from the results of which in another she formerly suffered, are admirably drawn. But in these paths the author did not long walk.

Jules Sandeau cannot be called on the whole a novelist of an extensive *répertoire*. Indeed, in very many cases, his scenes as well as his characters repeat themselves. The former are almost invariably taken from the department of the Creuse, his own birthplace and, as he often says, the least retoured and least bewritten part of France, or else from the districts of Brittany, in the immediate neighbourhood of Nantes. His favourite characters, though of course more numerous, are also not very difficult to count. A nobleman of

the old style returning to his diminished estates after the emigration or after 1815, his daughter, and one or more aspirants to his daughter's hand, supply the cast of perhaps his best books, *La Maison de Penarvan*, *Mademoiselle de Kérouare*, *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*. Another group, the best of which are *Fernand*, *Marianna*, and, to a certain extent, *Valcreuse*, displays the usual trio of husband, wife, and lover; the first, as I have said, rarely objectionable—perhaps the only exception is in *Le Docteur Herbeau*—the second *incomprise*, and suffering extensively from what our fathers called the vapours; the last ardent and insinuating, but eventually very sick of his bargain. In a great many other novels these types reappear partially and piecemeal, reinforced of course to a certain degree by others. Nearly all are drawn from either the old *noblesse* and their contemporaries, or from the generation of 1830. The Empire figures but little, Bernard Stamply, in *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*, being almost the only Imperialist character of importance. Generally speaking, the author is decidedly on the side of the past. He speaks intelligently enough of the defects of the *noblesse*, and has by no means a mere bric-à-brac affection for them. But at the same time the defects of their adversaries and successors appear to strike him, as it is natural that they should strike a man whose literary and artistic sympathies are especially

developed, with peculiar repugnance. While he does not at all flourish the white cockade, and while he is as severe upon the Emigrants as any one can possibly desire, he contrives to put the case of the nobles very strongly, and to bring the French ultra-Conservative's undying horror of Radicalism nearly as vividly before us as MM. Erckmann-Chatrian have exhibited the devotion of another class of Frenchmen to the principles of '89. In these, as well as in his more scattered personifications, he has an extraordinary delicacy of touch. There is, except in some early work, very little *esprit*, only just enough to be excused by Gautier's remark that it is pardonable sometimes to display that quality, *pour prouver aux sots qu'on pourrait être leur égal*.

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Occasionally there is a tendency to over-indulgence in long speeches and disquisitions, and to discourses about the characters, while the characters themselves are left in the cold. This is particularly noticeable in *Madame de Sommerville* (the earliest independent work) and in *Marianna*, two novels whose length is out of all proportion to their interest, though in *Marianna*, at least, there is plenty of interest for a story of more modest dimensions. *Un Héritage*, the only novel the plot of which is laid out of France, is another which sins a little by not being drawn to scale. But this is a fault out of which the author soon grew, and most of his later work is admirably

planned. Among his other excellencies it is fair to notice a power of interspersing unobtrusive reflections, showing not a little knowledge of human nature

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out of the ordinary range of the novelist's observation. Such, for instance, are his remarks in divers places on convalescence and its effects ; remarks which, but for the extreme improbability of the thing, might almost have been translated from Charles Lamb. But his characteristics will be best shown by a somewhat detailed account of one or more of his works. To begin with, I shall take *Mademoiselle de Kérouare*, a short novel, hardly going beyond the dimensions of a *nouvelle*, but one which I think excellently illustrates its writer's style and way of going to work. *Mademoiselle de Kérouare* is the daughter of a Vendean chief who in 1815 returned to his half-ruined château, and to hardly anything else. He had no thought of begging at the foot of the throne for compensation, and the throne had no thought of making him any. So he contented himself with growing old at Kérouare, in the society of his only daughter.

Marie de Kérouare grew up in the feudal castle like a flower in a Gothic vase. Her childhood enlivened the sombre dwelling ; her youth embellished it with a divine charm. At sixteen she was at once the delight and the pride of her father, and they still talk of her at Clisson, where on Sundays and holidays she went to hear mass. She was, indeed, a beautiful girl, with a grave face, but at the same time ready enough to smile ; and showing the

stately dignity of the Kérouares, tempered by the sweet light of youth. From her mother she inherited a delicate and tender soul ; from her father's family a character of chivalrous adventure, which had been fostered by her solitary nurture. From her cradle her father had entertained her with tales of war ; everything around reminded her of the Vendean struggle, full as it was of heroism of all kinds ; so that, in an atmosphere of glorious memories, on a soil still volcanic, under a sky haunted by mighty shadows, her imagination was naturally excited early, and was not likely to linger in the beaten paths' of reality. This precocious fanaticism was, however, softened by a disposition of perfect sweetness. On horseback, with floating hair, she was an Amazon ; attending on her father, she reminded one of Antigone. He was, indeed, the one passion of her little life. She loved him with no common affection, but her heart's needs did not as yet go further, and when M. de Grandlieu presented himself to ask of the Count de Kérouare his daughter's hand, Marie had simply never thought of other loves and other ties than those which bound her to her father.

The suitor' who thus presents himself is the son of an old brother-in-arms of the Count's, to whom Marie has been informally betrothed from her cradle. He is young, rich, handsome, and nobly born, his only fault being an invincible reserve and coldness of manner. He makes no overt objection to the suggestion to which Marie's youth and the Count's fondness for his daughter give some colour, that the marriage shall be put off for a few years, and Marie, glad of the respite, and not dreaming that M. de Grandlieu entertains any particular affection for her, soon forgets all about the engagement except that she is

accustomed to see her suitor at her side, and that sometimes the signs of tenderness breaking through his reserve rather astonish her than affect her in any other way. Meanwhile a sister of M. de Kérouare, who has offended him by a *mésalliance*, makes her appearance, intent on a reconciliation, and brings with her her son, an interesting youth of an impulsive character. The recovered relations make a three months' stay at the château. M. de Grandlieu is accidentally called away for the whole time, and Marie as a matter of course falls in love, girl-fashion, with her boy cousin, Octave. After his departure she says nothing about it, but gradually grows silent and *distracte*, much to the concern of her father and (secretly) of her lover, though the latter preserves his impassiveness, and only irritates her by showing her in his silent way the more attention the more sulky she is. All this time she dares not tell her secret to either, though the day of her marriage is now approaching, and the anger of M. de Kérouare against his brother-in-law and nephew is stirred up again by the part that the former takes in the opposition to Charles X. At length, when she is one night alone with her father, Marie takes partial courage. He sees her weeping, and demands to know the cause. At last she speaks—

"Father," she said, "if you must know it, I do not love M. de Grandlieu. When I allowed your word and mine to be given, I thought it possible that I might in time

bring myself to love him. It seemed to me easy then ; it seemed to me that my inclination could not long run contrary to your wishes. Forgive me, I was wrong. I have tried hard ; I have struggled long with my heart. I have suffered and waited in vain, and I feel that I must give up the effort. The day of my wedding is at hand, and it is that, father, which is killing your child.”

M. de Kérouare did not speak, but his brow was overcast. At last he said, in a slow and grave tone, “Are you quite sure, my daughter, that you cannot love M. de Grandlieu ?”

“Yes, father !” she cried.

“Are you certain that you can never love him ? that the marriage revolts your tastes and instincts ? and is it this which is killing my dearest child ?”

“Yes, father,” she murmured.

After a long silence, longer than the former, M. de Kérouare rose. “Daughter,” he said, “for the sake of your happiness I will do what I would never have done to save my own life in the days when I loved life best. May our ancestors pardon me for failing thus to observe their ancient loyalty ! For your sake I am going to ask back from a man of honour the word which you and I have freely pledged him.”

But at the very moment when the letter is about to be written to the rejected suitor, he himself appears. He has, of course, known nothing of Marie’s troubles, and his visit, directly as it concerns them, is of an entirely independent nature. He has been mixing in the Legitimist intrigues which 1830 excited anew in La Vendée ; his share has been discovered ; the popular vengeance is already directed against him, and he feels that his fortune is but a precarious one.

Accordingly he comes, of his own accord, to restore to M. de Kérouare and his daughter the word that they pledged him in his prosperity. "It does not become him to drag others to share his own ruin."

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The revulsion of feeling which this conduct, especially considering M. de Grandlieu's ignorance of her own feelings, produces in a girl of Marie's temperament and education may easily be guessed. At once, and before her father can reply, she speaks: "Monsieur de Grandlieu," said she, in a clear and steady voice, "if it is not for you to drag us down in your ruin, it is for us to follow you there. Your poverty is dearer to us than your fortune. As long as this house stands your refuge is here, and, if it is true that you love me, here, sir, is my hand." Her father's rapture, as he thus sees the point of honour more than satisfied, instead of insulted, as he had feared, is easy to imagine, and his untranslatable cry, "*Bien ! mon sang !*" expresses it finely. Nor do the scruples of Grandlieu shake Marie's resolution. She even insists on the marriage taking place quickly, although in private, and when the glow of the impulse is over her mental sufferings are worse than ever. On the eve of the wedding she writes a despairing letter of apology to Octave, of whom, since his departure from Kérouare, she has seen and heard nothing. She begs him to pardon her; implores him to allow her to die without his malediction, and then proceeds to

array herself for the sacrifice. On the very morning Grandlieu once more presents himself. "Mademoiselle," he says, "are you certain that you are not merely obeying a generous impulse? Are you sure that you have no repugnance in allying your destiny with mine? Did I not, without knowing it, take unfair advantage of a moment of enthusiasm and excitement, of which I had unintentionally and undésignedly been the cause? Did I not surprise you into consent? Do not allow yourself to be fettered by bashfulness, but tell me, Marie, for there is still time. You are dearer to me than life; yet I would not accept my happiness at the cost of a single tear of yours." But Mademoiselle de Kérouare has learnt her part too well. She is resolved to lose everything, *fors l'honneur*, and they are married.

At the end of the day, however, the almost inevitable breakdown comes. She wanders alone into the grounds of the château, and by the bank of the river where she had exchanged her ill-starred vows with Octave, her position at last presents itself to her fully. In a sort of delirium she roams about for hours, and at length the château is alarmed. But she returns at last and presents herself to her husband. To him then and too late she confesses that she does not and cannot love him, that she cannot bring herself to be a wife to him, and that though Octave is but a memory to her, to that memory she will remain faithful. Grandlieu

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accepts the situation as only a man of his stamp could accept it. He refuses to separate from his wife, or to afflict M. de Kérouare's last days with any open scandal. He will not avenge himself on Octave, whose identity, indeed, he does not know and scorns to ask; he will respect Marie's wishes and he hardly even reproaches her. Through the fever which her excitement and exposure have brought on, he nurses her assiduously, and afterwards so orders their life that no one suspects anything wrong. But he has a refuge. He busies himself more and more in Legitimist plots, hoping, or rather certain, thus one day to be able to free his wife from her fetters and himself from his misery, by his own death. Gradually a conviction of this resolve forces itself upon Marie; and as at the same time his unceasing care and the silence of Octave, who had never given a sign, have had a certain effect upon her mind, she becomes deeply moved, and even makes certain advances to her husband, which he repels, though with perfect gentleness. At last, thinking her completely recovered in health, he gives her a letter which had arrived during her illness, and which he has kept unread, from no jealous motives, but simply for fear of over-exciting her. It is from Octave; and the irony of fate may be easily divined. Octave has never thought again of his boy-and-girl flirtation with his cousin, has himself been long married, congratulates her heartily on her

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own wedding, and rallies her, not too delicately, on the romantic tone of her epistle.

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Marie read the letter through twice, the first time with an air of incredulity, the second with a cold and steady glance. Then she placed it quietly in its envelope, and the envelope in her pocket. Having done this she remained for a long time seated at the foot of the oak, with her head resting on her hands, calm, silent, and without movement. What passed in her? To understand this one must oneself have buried a living person in the *oubliette* of one's own heart. When she rose she was radiant and transfigured. It seemed to her that God had just drawn her from nothingness, and that the splendour of creation was before her for the first time. She passed her hands over her face with the gesture of one who would recollect herself, and then cast a look of delight on all around. All around was festival and joy. The birds sang at full throat pitch; the winged insects strewed the air with ruby, amethyst, and emerald; the haze which some hours before enveloped woods and uplands had disappeared, and all nature was sunning itself in the warm kisses of the light. Even so was it in Marie's soul; she heard new voices singing within her, and she saw the image of her husband disengaging itself from the mist in which it had so long been wrapped. It was a kind of revelation, and her whole being was drenched in unknown delight.

She returns to the château in the same half-bewitched condition, anticipating a complete explanation and a happy future. But the just gods have no such fate in store for her. As she reaches her home her husband is quitting it; and though they meet, he naturally enough mistakes the origin of the delight which her face shows, sets it down to the letter she has received from her lover, and hurries off to an insurgent rendezvous. The result

is, of course, a certainty. M. de Grandlieu refuses quarter and all chance of escape, and
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The story is simple enough, and the somewhat antique and heroic passions which it depicts may not be much to the taste of the present day, which must have a modern element in one kind or another in its fiction, whatever it desires in its furniture. For myself I must confess that "pour Chimène j'ai les yeux de Rodrigue," and that in presence of so exquisitely drawn a picture of the higher manners and morality I cannot be very careful to inquire whether it ever existed out of books, or whether the circumstances of its existence were or were not circumstances the extinction of which is to be regretted. That the author evidently sympathises strongly with the characters he draws, I have already said. But the sympathy is thoroughly artistic in character. Short as the story is, no one can possibly wish it either longer or shorter: the former wish being, it may be remarked with leave of a great authority, quite as bad a compliment to the art of a story as the latter. The characters have all the advantages and none of the drawbacks of distinct types. They have the clearness and firm drawing which are natural to their class; and, at the same time, the individuality, the want of

which is that class's besetting sin, M. de Grandlieu is not in the least a prig, despite his somewhat Grandisonian attributes: M. de Kérouare is nothing so little as a dummy *père noble*, and Marie herself is a perfect heroine. Her mistake, if mistake it be, is almost an inevitable consequence of her disposition and bringing-up; and her fate has just sufficient intermixture of destiny to be tragic, and just little enough to retain the human interest which the mere working of inauspicious stars is apt to destroy. The author's comic power is not indeed here shown as it is in the longer and better known *Maison de Penàrvan*; but, from the nature of the case and the scale of the book, comedy would have been decidedly out of place.

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An admirable example in a totally different style is *Catherine*. The opening words will best describe its scene—

St. Sylvain is a poor village in the district of La Marche. You may see there half a dozen thatched roofs clustered round a rustic church, very much as ragged children cluster round their mother; she gathers them lovingly together, and presses them to her bosom to warm them. The country is poor but picturesque, and its special charm in my eyes is that no tourist's indiscretion has ever revealed its secret. In winter you would think it Siberia; but when spring comes, everything becomes gay, green, flowery, and full of song. The village hides its poverty under a cloak of foliage, which April and May throw over its shoulders; the bindweed stars the hedges; the cherry-trees scatter odorous snow over the footpaths; and the very thatch itself is transformed into a flower-garden, where wallflowers and

house-leek, bluebells and pellitory, grow and flourish in good understanding with one another.

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The central figure of the little society of St. Sylvain is, of course, the curé, François Paty, a priest possessed of all the excellencies of Chaucer's and Goldsmith's parsons, but endowed with considerably less than even forty pounds a year. He has, however, one treasure in his niece Catherine, a girl of seventeen, called by all the country round sometimes La Petite Vierge, from a fancied resemblance to a picture of Our Lady in the church, sometimes La Petite Fée, from her good deeds and her fairy-like appearance. •

When there was some distress to relieve at St. Sylvain or in the neighbourhood, and the vicar's purse and the poor-box were both empty, Catherine would send to the nearest town and sell her embroidery, or at the worst would mount Annette, her uncle's mare, and go a-begging in the district, sure to return with a coin or two in her bag. As soon as she was seen either in a farmyard or at the gates of a country house the cry would be, "Here is La Petite Vierge on her rounds for the poor;" and each one would give her a kind word and a contribution. She was known for a dozen miles round, and her apparition was always taken as a good omen. It was she who dressed the church on holidays, sometimes with the flowers she gathered, at others with those which her fingers had made. As for her house-keeping, it was worth seeing; and so were the cunning repairs she managed to make in her uncle's single surplice and cassock.

This being the case, it is not to be wondered at that the vicar was proud of his niece, and that he was wont to express this pride to his chief

confidant, Monsieur Noirel, the second man in the village, who united the high functions of churchwarden and school-master to the reputation of possessing considerable hoards, and the actual possession of a son, Claude by name, who assisted in school, performed the functions of clerk with a loud and clear voice, and was unfortunately very ugly. In the opinion of the village, however, there could be no doubt about Catherine and Claude making a match of it; and Papa Noirel, like a shrewd French peasant, was by no means averse to the idea of a daughter-in-law who, if she had little ready money, was an admirable housewife, and could be made to keep herself and a good deal more by her embroidery.

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Now, at the moment when the story opens, St. Sylvain was in a very bad way. Times had been hard; the resources of the vicar and the charity of the neighbourhood had been quite used up, and at the very moment came an episcopal intimation from the Bishop of Limoges that he intended to hold a visitation at the village on the day (soon to come round) of its patron saint. This honour and compliment, for such it was, nearly drove poor François out of his mind. How were himself, his curate, and his church to be made presentable? How were the Bishop and a dozen clergy to be entertained? Nobody but Noirel had either money or means, and he, as may be supposed, was not eager to offer. So the

vicar, in placid despair, resolved, after the manner of men and vicars, to leave the question of the Bishop's reception to fate. Not so Catherine. She remembers one château of the neighbourhood where she has never begged ; chiefly, it must be confessed, because begging there seemed hopeless. This was Bigny, the property of a certain Count de Songères, who had left the country by no means in the odour of sanctity years before, and where a bailiff of evil and ferocious manners reigned in his master's stead. Despite the ill repute of the place, Catherine, escorted some way by Claude, makes the effort, and is received by the bailiff as might be expected. She is refused with all sorts of insults, and the repulse, so different from the treatment she usually meets with, coupled with her despair about the Bishop's reception, quite breaks her down. She sits weeping at the foot of a tree for a long time, when suddenly a heavenly apparition manifests itself.

She had been crying for nearly an hour, and the sun was already lengthening the shadows of the cypresses and pines when she heard sudden barkings. She started up in terror, thinking that Robineau, the bailiff, had actually loosed the mastiffs on her ; but she was soon reassured, by finding playful hounds, well mannered and affectionate, licking her hands and frolicking round her. Soon she saw a young man in a plain hunting dress, with gun on shoulder. He was tall and slight. A frock-coat with metal buttons showed a figure as lithe as Catherine's own ; a black velvet cap only half hid his golden hair, and his pale and distinguished countenance showed his aristocratic birth.

The angelic being in metal-buttoned coat and black velvet cap is the Count's son Roger, but he is no wolf in sheep's clothing. He consoles Catherine, presents her with a handsome subscription, and when her inexperience has spent all this on vestments and such like matters, leaving nothing for my Lord Bishop's creature comforts, he comes once more to the rescue by sending from the château, not merely carp and geese, pies and wine of unapproachable excellence, but even plate and linen. Thus the visitation is an immense success, and the excellent Bishop reads his attendant clergy a lecture on the way in which the vicar, without ever grumbling at his tiny stipend, is able to entertain thus royally by means of thrift and good management. Meanwhile Roger has been improving his acquaintance with Catherine, quite in the way of honesty, but much to the discomfiture of the good Claude, who, even setting aside his ugliness, is obviously nowhere in comparison. Roger falls desperately in love with La Petite Vierge, and determines to marry her, she on her side being naturally carried away by the beauty and amiability of the young gentleman. At this point, however, the Count de Songères himself appears on the scene. He has been informed of all that has happened, and a good deal more, too, by Robineau, the bailiff; and he has quite other views for Roger. Indeed, he intends him to marry his cousin Malvina,

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daughter of an affectionate sister of his. This sister, having made a *mésalliance*, and thereby enriched herself, is now amiably endeavouring to oust her brother, who had not disdained to borrow from his *parvenu* brother-in-law, from the family estates. Malvina is determined on a title and a château, and the Count does not see why he should not pay his debts with Roger and the worthless estate of Bigny. But he cannot take the high parental line with the young man, for the simple reason that he has wasted all the fortune due to him from his mother, and therefore a rupture would be highly inconvenient; so he feigns amiability, persuades Malvina and her mother to come down to Bigny, and fits up the old ramshackle château gorgeously for their reception. Malvina cannot resist the idea of visiting the castle of her ancestors, and as she is a very handsome girl the Count does not doubt of succeeding in his designs on Roger. He manages admirably; as well as Major Pendennis himself. He makes no secret of the affair with Catherine, even to his sister and niece, but speaks of it with gentle irony as a generous and poetical outburst of youth. With Malvina his conversation is all of the family arms, the room in the château that Charles VII slept in, the jewels that Marie Antoinette gave his mother, and so forth. To his sister he represents the uncertainty of the law and the wisdom of amicable settlements.

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As to Roger, he simply lets him alone, contrives that he shall be as much as possible in Malvina's company, and blandly puts aside the young man's passionate declarations towards Catherine. Now Roger, for an angel in metal buttons and black velvet cap, is rather a weak-minded young man. He has not the least intention of giving Catherine up, but his appointments with her are ingeniously frustrated ; her image is gradually removed from his mind, and Malvina is certainly pretty. The final stroke is given by a cunning interview, in which Madame Barnajon, the mother, points out to Catherine the injury she will do Roger if she holds him to his word, while La Petite Vierge herself sees the cousins apparently on the best of terms with each other. The *dénouement*, however, is not so simple as it may seem. The good vicar is fatally injured in rescuing a child from a burning house, or rather in endeavouring to do so, for the real rescuer of both is Claude. The latter, who is aware of Catherine's position, and is resolved to play out the part of self-sacrifice which he has begun by refusing (much to his father's disgust) to urge his suit to the vicar's niece, goes off to fetch Roger as a consoler for Catherine, and all meet by the vicar's deathbed. He has never deceived himself as to the lover's amiable but weak character, and is in despair for his defenceless niece.

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When Roger had finished speaking, and had made full

offer of all his worldly goods, Catherine remained musingly silent, and allowed her eyes to wander reflect-

JULES ingly from her lover to her uncle, and from
SANDEAU. her uncle to Claude, who remained modestly at the end of the room. Roger still on his knees, François half sitting on his bed, awaited her answer, the one full of hope, the other of alarm. Claude alone expected nothing. Some minutes passed thus.

During this time, what was passing in Catherine's mind? Did she by one of those instantaneous acts of intuition, which no analysis can reach, understand the change that had taken place in the Viscount's heart during the last few days? Did she tell herself that the sacrifice of her whole life was not too much to assure the happiness of her uncle? Did she blench at the idea suggested by Madame Barnajon, that in accepting Roger she would be placing a stumbling-block in his way? Or, remembering all that Claude had been and done for her, did she, child as she was, feel irresistibly the desire to reward so much self-sacrifice? We know not. With a sudden movement of despairing tenderness, like a young mother who is separated from her child, she took in both her hands Roger's golden head, and kissed his forehead and his hair: then she rose and went towards Claude.

"Brother," she said, "you know my heart and its sufferings. I do not think I can recover, and if I do I shall keep in my heart a spell of sadness of which time will not relieve me. All that I can promise, and that I promise before God, is to hold unstained the honour of the hearth which gives me the right to sit at it. Have you courage and strength enough to open the door of your house to me?"

Claude's answer may be guessed, and so the vicar goes to his rest, and Roger to Malvina.

But the task of the churchwarden's son is not finished. Catherine and he are only betrothed, not married, and even then, there is the still

longer step between marriage and love. For a year Catherine and her old maid live peaceably enough at Noirel's, Claude being as assiduous as ever, but if possible even more respectful. At the end of the year Noirel dies, leaving a still fuller stocking than report had credited him with. The marriage can be no longer delayed, and Claude takes up his residence at the neighbouring town to arrange his affairs and make his preparations. They are married, and he takes her, not to the old village home, but to Bigny itself, which he has bought,—Malvina had soon tired of the ramshackle castle—altered, and refurnished' as a roomy farmhouse. At first she does not know whether to be pleased at the infinite little cares for her comfort which the place shows, or scandalised at his want of delicacy in bringing her to a home necessarily full of the memories of his rival. But in the evening he disappears, and she soon receives this letter—

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Catherine, you are still heart-sick. I am not necessary to you now; and I feel that my presence would only fret your distress and retard your cure. I am going away, happy enough in the thought that your uncle in heaven has no reason to be dissatisfied with me. Had I thought that I could, without chaining your life to mine, have made you accept the modest affluence which my father has left me, I should have said to you, Take it. But you would not have taken anything. Forgive me for having married you; I did it only in order to have the right of giving you all. Your fortune is not great, but it is enough to allow you to live pleasantly, to fear no want, and to do some good to your

poor, whose providence you will, I know, continue to be.

Do not disturb yourself about me ; I am

JULES taking with me much more than I shall want.

SANDEAU. I shall try to travel a little, and to become less of a bumpkin, by knocking about the world. Try on your part to recover, if not completely, at any rate enough to be able to bear me when I ask you to take me in. You will find a corner somewhere for me, and you shall not find me a nuisance. Besides, if it worries you to see the face at which you used to laugh, I will set out once more on my travels, and will not come back again till you call me.—Your brother,

CLAUDE.

When she had read her letter Catherine first put it to her lips, and then placed it as a talisman next her heart.

At the end of the year Claude returned. We do not know if he set out again. All that we do know is, that the precise day of his return was the last of the history of *La Petite Vierge*.

I have selected these two stories for more particular analysis because they seem to me to show better than any others the peculiarly quiet and delicate art, hardly to be reproduced in any abstract, with which Sandeau treats subjects that would, with less careful workmanship and handling, be ordinary and commonplace enough. Neither of the stories could, perhaps, be termed his masterpiece if we are to look to length and scale as well as to excellence. Probably *La Maison de Penarvan*, which is also his best known work in England, deserves that title as well as any other. The picture of Renée de Penarvan, last of her race, burying her youth and beauty for years in the joint composition of

a history of her house—her collaborator being a most admirably original copy (if the oxymoron be allowable) of Dominie Sampson—waking up to real life when she finds that there is still a Penarvan alive and in danger of the two unpardonable sins of Liberalism and a *mésalliance*, captivating and marrying him almost against his will, forcing him into the ranks of the Chouans, where he meets his death, bringing up her daughter, to whom she never forgives her sex, in stern seclusion, turning her off at once for marrying a bourgeois, and only at last melted into humanity by her grandchild, is in many ways an admirable one. Very good again is *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*, with 'its curious theme of an enriched peasant driven by aristocratic wiles to restore to his old *seigneur* the estate which the latter has forfeited by emigration. *Valcreuse* deserves special notice both for its merits, and because it illustrates the peculiar theory of feminine weakness as a matter of course to which I have before referred. *Madeleine*, a well-known book, and one deservedly honoured by the author's future colleagues with a crown, is perhaps a little Utopian in its picture of a young *roué*, reformed by his cousin, and by the agency of honest labour in which she ingeniously engages him; but it is a charming sketch. So is *La Chasse au Roman*, a decorous but most amusing treatment of the same theme which Théophile Gautier, in *Celle-ci et Celle-là*, and

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Feydeau in *Sylvie*, not to mention many others, have also handled, and of which, the familiar English play-title of *The Way to Win Him* tells the story. Lest it be thought that I am eulogising indiscriminately, let me mention as by no means so successful *Le Docteur Herbeau*, an exaggerated and painful study of senile folly and its punishment, and *Sacs et Parchemins*—almost the only one of Sandeau's books which I have found tedious, though it turned into an admirable play. On the other hand, his boy's book, *La Roche aux Mouettes*, most certainly, deserves the honour of translation into English which has fallen to its lot; and his chief work since the war, *Jean de Thommeray*, seems to me to merit more favour than it has received, especially for its sketch of 1830 from a new point of view. Sandeau, it may readily be believed, was but half the child of that glorious and stormy epoch, and the illustrations of it to which he seems fondest of alluding are Lamartine and Vigny, not Hugo. Had he been present at the first representation of *Hernani*, I can hardly think that it would have been with a red ticket. Finally, it must be noticed that his shortest stories are among the best things he has done. *Olivier* is spoilt by some obvious improbabilities, but *Le Château de Montsabrey*, *Le Jour sans Lendemain*, and *Un Début dans le Magistrature* are perfect in their kind. What that kind is must have been

already sufficiently indicated. Scandal there is none in Sandeau's work. Yet the author is steeped to the lips in that artistic feeling which, according to some people, inevitably leads to the confounding of moral distinctions, the selection of perilous and dubious subjects, the subjection of everything to the *culte féroce du beau*, and so forth. Unless they escape from the difficulty by declaring that Sandeau, not being immoral, cannot be an artist-writer, they must accept the demolition of their cherished delusion, that to praise the art of a writer is a cunning cloak intended to hide a taste for immorality. If *La Maison de Penarvan* and its fellows are not acceptable to every mood of every mind, that is a drawback which they share with a good deal of literature. It may perhaps require a little time to adjust the eye to the subdued atmosphere of a region "where the world is quiet," where there is passion enough, but passion which rarely tears itself to tatters, and can live, and sometimes die, without shrieking and attitudinising. But when the eye has got its focus it is apt to return to the spectacle, and to be greatly refreshed and delighted thereby. To use once more in an altered and happier form words which were applied to Sandeau in days long gone by, "Quand on l'aura trouvé, on saura le garder."

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IX

OCTAVE FEUILLET

(1878¹)

THE reader of a certain section of French literature is sometimes tempted to make reflections similar to those which occurred to the excellent Babouc during his visit to the city of Persepolis. "Il conclut qu'une telle société ne pouvait subsister : que la jalousie, la discorde, la vengeance, devaient désoler toutes les maisons : que les larmes et le sang devaient couler tous les jours : que certainement les maris tueraient les galants de leurs femmes, ou en seraient tués : et qu'enfin Ituriel faisait fort bien de détruire tout d'un coup une ville abandonnée à de continuels désordres." It is true that, as in Babouc's case, these lugubrious sentiments are not likely to be unmixed. We read of the Scythian that by degrees "il s'affectionnait à la ville, dont le peuple était poli, doux et bienfaisant, quoique léger, médisant et plein de vanité." But still it is a little difficult for persons of other races than the

¹ See Preface.

French, in reading the average novel of French society, to abstain from a certain wonder how French society manages, on its own showing, to subsist. For my own part, I do not know any novelist who produces this sensation of wonder more forcibly than M. Octave Feuillet. This is doubtless owing in great part to the excellence of his workmanship, but it is owing also to the moderation of it. M. Feuillet is never eccentric, even though there be in these days a greater license of eccentricity allowed to academicians than of old. He is never abnormal or paradoxical; he does not go to the ends of the earth to catch one vagary of passion, and then laboriously elaborate its strangeness. It is not from him that we should expect the grave remark made by another writer, "Heureuse elle-même, elle trouvait naturel de faire les autres heureux,"—that is to say, the lady referred to was so exceedingly fond of her husband that she could not find it in her heart to be cruel to her lover. M. Feuillet, moreover, appears to be guided by something more than taste and common sense in the selection of his subjects. He proceeds distinctly upon the lines of religion and morality; he deplores the disorders which he relates as sincerely as may be; he endeavours as best he can to point out their remedies; and in his descriptions he very carefully avoids undue complaisance and undue luxuriance of language. Yet in almost every one of his larger novels the

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principal parts, or some of them, are taken by lovers whose love is unrecognised by law, and the fact of the general prevalence of such love is as much taken for granted as by Balzac himself.

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The unpleasant effect which is thus produced is to my fancy much increased by a curious peculiarity of the author. I do not know whether it be a consequence of the orthodoxy upon which M. Feuillet prides himself, but in almost every case his Adams and their Eves observe strictly the traditional relationship. Eve is always the tempter, and, generally speaking, Adam yields in a half-hearted, remorseful, and (I fear I must say) rather currish manner. This proceeds, not so much from any intellectual conviction uncomplimentary to women, as from a kind of unacknowledged artistic predilection. The particular situation is one that M. Feuillet feels he can treat, and he treats it accordingly. It certainly produces incomparably the finest scenes in his novels, and perhaps the finest of these are those in which the temptation is unsuccessful. I should choose as M. Feuillet's masterpieces the fatal passion of Julia de Trécœur for her stepfather, and the piteous efforts of La Petite Comtesse to soften the savage breast of her learned lover. Next to these comes the scene in which M. de Camors finds his honour too weak to guarantee him against the fascinations of the Marquise de Campvallou. Varying illustrations of the same theme occur in

the *Histoire de Sibylle*, where Madame d'Estrény and Clotilde fight for the hero; and in ' *Les Amours de Philippe*, where the part is played twice, once in the vicious sense by Madame de Talyas and once in the virtuous by Jeanne. Even Marguerite, in the *Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*, wayward as she is, unmistakably makes the first advances. *Un Mariage dans le Monde* indeed is without this motive. But *Un Mariage dans le Monde*, like all the rest, exhibits M. Feuillet's general theory of what may be called the caducity of the feminine sex. His heroines demand in one way or other to fall, or at least to be fallen in love with. The author would apparently recommend that this weakness should be met by a sort of series of fallings in love on the part of the husband—a rather herculean task which, it must be admitted, has not often been attempted by those to whom it is prescribed. *Un Mariage dans le Monde* does indeed contain an instance. But the possibility of that instance is chiefly owing to the part played by the house-friend, M. de Kévern, and, as the author himself feels bound to remark, "les Kévern sont fort rares." Beyond this M. Feuillet has nothing to recommend except an improvement of feminine education, which he represents as being at a very low ebb in France. This is dispiriting at the moment that our authorities on the subject in England are discussing whether the increase of feminine education

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will not end in the disuse of marriage altogether. If the water is going to choke us in this fashion, what are the modest devotees of a marriage, which shall be at least *bon*, if, according to the maxim, not *délicieux*, to do?

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However, M. Octave Feuillet is clearly not responsible for this difficulty. He has to do with things as he finds them, and if we are to believe him, what he finds is a lack of culture in women, a lack of sympathy in men, and a lack of principle in both. This latter want he finds to be partially supplied by a sort of vague feeling of honour, and great part of his books is occupied in demonstrating the insufficiency of the substitute. Philippe and M. de Camors are instances of the breakdown in men. In the other sex M. Feuillet seems to consider it rather more efficient. The aversion of the ermine to the mud is a phrase which recurs in his books with curious frequency, and nothing but this aversion seems, according to him, to have, as things go, much restraining power over his heroines.

I have dwelt rather longer than usual upon these peculiarities, because there is much more moral purpose, such as it is, in M. Feuillet than there has been in any French novelist of the first class for a great number of years. To pass to the more purely literary characteristics of his work, the first thing which strikes the critical reader is its remarkably dramatic character. Nearly all French novelists have had more or less

to do with the drama, and it is not to any peculiarity of M. Feuillet in this respect that I am alluding. But his ^{OCTAVE} ^{FEUILLET.} purely narrative work is often much more distinguished by dramatic than by narrative peculiarities. The incident of the tree-climbing in *M. de Camors* has, I believe, struck several people in this light. So it is with the incident of Clotilde's setting her dog at the madman in *Sibylle*, and of the Jeune Homme Pauvre's solution of the difficulty at the Tower of Elven. These dramatic moments often, though not always, have little importance in the narrative as such; and from this arises a sense not exactly of incongruity, but of incompleteness. Another thing which has struck me strongly in M. Feuillet is that his execution is rarely equal to his design. No novelist introduces a subject better, no one has such a faculty of exciting expectation and engaging attention. Furthermore—and this is perhaps additional proof of his specially dramatic faculty—no one knows so well how to arrange all the accessories of his story. His descriptions are not only models of style, but models also of proportion; his by-play is excellent; his comic interludes (usually supplied by some self-indulgent old lady of the inveterate Parisian type) are capital. No one has hit off more admirably the woman of the Second Empire, whose one ambition was to be *tapageuse* in dress and in conduct, whether the *tapage* be the comparatively

refined manner of *La Petite Comtesse* and Madame de Rias, or the mere boisterous vulgarity of Mesdames Bacquière and Van Cuyp, who run races up and down a drawing-room with their feet in their husbands' hats. But with all this excellence of design and of detail the central interest is often badly preserved. When about two-thirds of the book have been read, a great disposition to yawn is apt to come over one, an incurable desire to count the remaining pages, to look at the end, to resort to any illegitimate means of finishing. The real end of *M. de Camors* is at the cruel death of the general; the real catastrophe of *Sibylle* is the dinner-party where Raoul makes his unfortunate profession of unfaith. *Bellah*, which, despite much charming description, I think quite unworthy of its author, has neither beginning nor end, properly speaking, though the beginning would have been an admirable one for a different book. It is not so with the *Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre* or with *Julia de Trécœur*, and these I shall accordingly take for abstract. Neither has the attempt at elaborate analysis of character which distinguishes *M. de Camors*, and neither comes quite up to the pathos of *La Petite Comtesse*. But for several reasons they are better suited to my purpose.

Julia de Trécœur is the daughter of an accomplished and amiable but good-for-nothing father and of an angelic mother—rather a favourite

pedigree with M. Feuillet, it may be observed. Her father does his utmost to spoil her, and succeeds very fairly, so that she is the terror of her grandmother and of all her mother's friends. Madame de Trécœur is released from her rather trying partnership by the death of her husband when Julia is still very young, and as soon as a decent period of widowhood has elapsed, her mother, the Baroness de Pers, decides that she had much better marry again, a proposal to which the disconsolate widow is by no means averse. She has a cousin, and the cousin has an inseparable friend. Their names are respectively Moras and Lucan; they have lived together, have fired their shots in the American Civil War together, and resemble each other in being persons of great probity and honour. Clotilde de Trécœur has fixed her affections upon the friend, and the friend is nothing loath to receive them. The great obstacle, however, is Julia, who is passionately devoted to the memory of her father, and of whose violent temper her mother stands in considerable awe. The young lady indeed abstains from quarrelling with her mother when the announcement is made to her. But nothing will induce her to see or enter into friendly relations with her father's supplanter, and accordingly, when the marriage approaches, she retires to a convent. After a time a fancy seizes her to take the veil, and she is on the point of so doing when Pierre de Moras,

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her mother's cousin, avows his love for her, and asks her hand in marriage. She accepts this rather startling change of plan without much reluctance, but she still refuses to see her stepfather, M. de Lucan, and sets off with her own husband to Italy. In her letters to her mother, however, she shows some signs of relenting, and it is at last arranged that she and her husband shall come and pass the summer at M. de Lucan's château, near Cherbourg, for, as may be noticed in passing, M. Feuillet's country scenes are almost invariably Norman. It is thus that the meeting takes place :—

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It was in the beginning of June. Clotilde set out early, and Lucan followed on horseback at a slow pace some two hours later. The roads of Normandy are charming at this season. The hawthorn hedges perfume the country, and throw their tufts of rosy-tinted snow here and there over the edge of the path. The slopes of the ditches are covered with a profusion of fresh greenery dotted with wild flowers, the whole making under the bright morning sun a charming feast for the eye. M. de Lucan however, contrary to his custom, gave but divided attention to this spectacle of Nature in her smiles. He was occupied to a degree which surprised himself by his approaching meeting with his step-daughter. Julia had been so constantly in his thoughts that she had left on them an exaggerated impression. He tried in vain to reduce this to its due proportions, which were after all only those of a child, once a spoiled child, now a returning prodigal. He had grown accustomed to clothe her in his fancy with mysterious importance, and with a sort of fatal power of which he found it difficult to disrobe her. He felt amused and half irritated at his own folly. But he could not avoid a sensation of curiosity and vague disquiet at the moment of seeing face to face the

sphinx whose shadow had so long disturbed his life, and who was at last about to come under his roof.

At length an open carriage, covered with an awning of sunshades, appeared at the top of a rising ground. Lucan saw a head leaning out of the carriage and a handkerchief waving; then he set forward at a gallop. Almost at the same instant the carriage stopped, and a girlish figure jumped lightly out. She turned to say a word to her travelling companions, and then came forward alone to meet Lucan. Not wishing to be outdone, he dismounted, gave his horse to the groom, and walked forward eagerly to meet the lady whom he did not know, but who evidently was Julia. She came towards him at an unhurried pace, with a gliding step, and a slight swaying motion of her figure. As she came near she pushed back her veil, and Lucan recognised in her youthful face, in her large and somewhat melancholy eyes, in her beautiful brows, some traces of the child he had once known. When Julia's glance met his the pale face reddened. He bowed low, and, smiling, said, "Welcome."—"Thank you," said she, with a voice whose grave melody struck him; "we are friends, are we not?" and she held out both her hands to him. He was about to draw her towards him, but feeling a faint resistance in her arms, he contented himself with kissing the wrist of her gloved hand. Then pretending to regard her with an admiring gallantry, which for the matter of that was sincere enough, "I really think," said he, "that I ought to ask you to whom I have the honour of speaking."—"You think me grown," said she, with a smile which showed her dazzling teeth. "Immensely," he replied, "immensely. I do not wonder at Pierre."

So the meeting passes off, the friends glad to meet again, Madame de Lucan delighted with Julia, and Lucan himself admiring his step-daughter's beauty, and half amused, half pleased by her quaint manner. Julia immediately takes

a great fancy to the château, and this increases her stepfather's approbation of her.

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She displays, however, a certain flightiness, often amusing herself by mimicking her rather solemn and prosaic husband, by burlesquing Italian music, and so forth. Every now and then, too, when she is alone with her stepfather, slight relapses of temper appear, of which, however, he takes little notice, putting them down as the remains of her spoilt-child humours. About a fortnight after her arrival a ball takes place in the neighbourhood, and as both Madame de Lucan and M. de Moras have no particular affection for balls, they go home early, leaving Julia to be escorted back by her stepfather. She makes a gesture of impatience when she is told of the arrangement, but says nothing.

About an hour afterwards she grew tired of being worshipped, and asked for her carriage. As she was wrapping herself up in the hall Lucan offered to help her. "No," she said pettishly, "please don't. Men know nothing about it." Then she threw herself into the carriage with an air of weariness. However, as the horses started she said in a more amiable tone, "Won't you smoke?" Lucan hanked her, but did not avail himself of the permission; and then, as he settled himself in his corner, he said, "You are very beautiful to-night, my dear child."—"Sir," said Julia, coolly but positively, "I forbid you to think me beautiful, and to call me your dear child."—"Very well," said Lucan; "you are not beautiful, then, you are not dear to me, and you are not a child."—"A child!" she answered; "I should think not." She buried her face in her veil,

crossed her arms, and leant back in her corner where the moonlight from time to time flashed on her white skin. "May I go to sleep?" asked OCTAVE she. "Why, of course," he replied. "Shall FEUILLET. I shut the window?"—"If you like. But won't my flowers annoy you?"—"Not in the least." After a silence, "M. de Lucan," said Julia. "Well, my dear lady?"—"Will you be kind enough to give me a lesson in etiquette, for I don't understand it? Is it allowable and proper to let a gentleman of your age and a lady of mine come home from a ball alone together at two o'clock in the morning?"—"But," said Lucan, gravely enough, "I am not a gentleman; I am your mother's husband."—"Ah, yes!" said she, "you are my mother's husband," and she raised her voice over the words in such a manner that Lucan thought an explosion was about to follow. But she seemed to choke down something and went on almost in a lively tone. "Yes, you are my mother's husband, and it seems to me that you are a very bad husband for my mother."—"You think so," said Lucan quietly. "Why?"—"Because you do not suit her at all."—"Pray have you asked your mother about that, my dear lady? For it seems to me that she is the best judge."—"There is no need to consult her. One has only to look at you. My mother is an angelic creature, and you are not."—"What am I then?"—"You are romantic, excitable. . . . In fact, just her opposite, and some day or other you will be false to her."—"Never," said Lucan, a little severely. "Are you quite sure?" said Julia, looking straight at him from the depths of her hood. "My dear lady," answered Lucan, "you asked me just now to be good enough to teach you what is proper and what is not. Well, then, it is *not* proper that we should make your mother and my wife the subject of a pleasantry of this kind. Consequently it *is* proper that we should hold our tongues." She was silent, made no movement, and closed her eyes, but in a minute he saw a tear drop from her long lashes upon her cheek. "I have hurt you, my child," said he; "I beg your pardon most sincerely."—"You may spare your excuses," she replied in a

muffled tone, but opening her great eyes suddenly, "I do not want them any more than I want your

OCTAVE lessons. I should be glad to know what I FEUILLET. have done to deserve such a humiliation.

What harm was there in my words, and what else could I have said? Is it my fault that I am alone with you, that I am forced to talk to you, that I hardly know what to say? Why am I made to suffer this? Why am I asked to do more than I can? Is not the part I have to play daily enough and too much a thousand times? God knows I am tired of it!" Lucan had some difficulty in repressing his painful surprise at this outburst. "Julia," he said at last, "you were good enough to tell me that we were friends, and I thought it was true. Is it not so?"—"No," she said with energy, and then wrapping her veil round her she remained during the rest of the journey plunged in a silence which M. de Lucan did not disturb.

Lucan is naturally not a little discomposed at the prospect of renewed family dissensions which this declaration of war opens, and the next day Julia makes matters worse. Her husband confesses to his friend that he himself cannot understand her, and has not the least hold on her affections. She is as sulky as she can be, and almost insolent to Lucan. The day after, however, her humour again changes, she apologises formally to her stepfather, invites him to go out for a solitary expedition with her, and makes confidences, half-serious and half-playful, as to her aspirations and longings. At this juncture Madame de Pers makes her appearance on the scene, and is half pleased and half puzzled at her granddaughter's mood. Julia, however, pays no

attention to her, and after dinner, though some guests are present to do honour to the baroness, she insists, on pretext of the heat, that her stepfather shall take her out into the grounds.

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She went out, and Lucan with her. In the hall she waited to wrap herself in her great white veil, hesitated a moment between the garden gate and that of the courtyard, and at last making up her mind said, "Let us go to the Ladies' Walk; it is coolest there." The Ladies' Walk, which opened at the end of the courtyard in the opposite direction to the avenue, was her favourite spot. It was a gently inclined path leading between the rocky slope of the wooded hills and the edge of a ravine, which seemed to have been part of the moat of the old castle. At the bottom of this ravine a brook ran with a melancholy sound, and after a time lost itself in a small pond, overhung with willows and guarded by two marble nymphs, to whom the Ladies' Walk owed its name, which was of old date. Half-way between the courtyard and the pond the slopes were piled with fragments of walls and broken arches, the relics of the fortifications, and for some paces the ruined buttresses pressed close on the walk, and, crowned as they were with ivy and brier, threw over it a dense mass of shade. At night when the shadow was deepened it looked as if the way were interrupted by a sudden abyss. At the same time the sombre character of the scene had some relief. The path was neatly gravelled, there were garden seats here and there against the slope; finally, the grassy inclines which led down to the brook were covered with blue-bells, with violets, and with dwarf roses, whose odour hung in the confined space like that of incense in a church.

In this favourable scene Julia's vapours, as our great-grandfathers would have said, come to a climax. After some minutes of her usual enigmatical conversation she says—

"Do you hate me a little now?"—"A little."—"Please be serious. I know that I have pained you much. Will you forgive me?" Her voice OCTAVE FEUILLET. had a feeling in it which was not common, and which touched Lucan. "With all my heart, my child," said he. She stopped, seized both his hands. "Is that true? Have we done with hating each other?" she said low and timidly. "Are you a little fond of me?"—"I am very grateful to you," said he with emotion, "and I am very fond of you." She drew him gently towards her, and he kissed her frankly on the brow which she held out to him; but at the same moment he felt her figure stiffen, her head fall back, and she sank powerless in his arms.

It is of course impossible that such a scene should fail to excite a suspicion of its meaning in the least coxcomically inclined of men. Lucan, puzzled and shocked, tries to get over the difficulty by ironical language to Julia when she comes to herself, and, without saying anything to the other inhabitants of the chateau, by withdrawing from her society as much as possible. After a time things go on quietly again, and his apprehension is stilled.

But Julia has no intention of going on quietly, and another scene of the same kind, but still less ambiguous, is forced upon him. He becomes almost beside himself with agitation and with fear, lest his wife and his friend should remark the state of things. At last there is no longer room for doubt. The quartette have been visiting the range of cliffs which faces Alderney, and Julia has persuaded Lucan to try a footpath to the

summit. They find it scarcely practicable, and are in great peril. He has at length almost to drag her up.

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At last he had the delight of setting his foot on a space of level ground standing out from the rock. With an effort he drew Julia towards it. Her head bent forward and rested on his shoulder. He heard her heart beat with terrible violence. Little by little this agitation calmed down; she slowly lifted her head, opened her long lashes, and looking at him with eyes entranced she murmured, "I am so happy! I could die here!" He thrust her brusquely at arm's length from him. Then drawing her to him again and grasping her firmly he threw a troubled look on the abyss below. She felt sure that death was at hand. For a moment her face grew pale, then she said, "With you? Ah, what joy!" At the same moment they heard voices, the voices of Clotilde and of Moras. He drew his arm from Julia, and without speaking, but with a gesture of command, pointed to the path. "Without you, then," she said gently, but proudly. But she went on. . . .

In the evening Lucan seeks the Ladies' Walk, and fights out his battle with his own soul. Hitherto he has been sure of himself, but he now finds that the irresistible Venus has set her grasp upon him. The very horror of the crime adds to its attraction, and at the moment Julia herself appears. But he is not wholly conquered, and he hides himself, hoping to escape notice. She sees him, but she understands the movement and its meaning, and passes him with the single word "Farewell!" pausing only for a moment as she speaks. With one supreme effort he remains silent.

Next morning, she throws herself on horseback over the cliff, at the fatal spot, in the presence of Lucan and Moras, who have followed her, but who do not interfere, the husband having in reality penetrated the whole mystery.

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Were it not for the inexpressibly revolting circumstances of the catastrophe, I should call *Julia de Trécœur* a perfect story. *Tue-la!* is one thing. For a joint society, composed of husband and lover, even though the latter be guiltless, to contemplate *la* while she kills herself, is another. It is true that suicide is the only ending dramatically possible for Julia, but the circumstances of the suicide might have been differently arranged. Again, it is not pleasant to catch a last glimpse of a heroine as she whips and forces an unfortunate horse to accompany her in her search for worlds not realised. These quite surprising blemishes are evidence of an occasional wrong-headedness at critical points which is characteristic of M. Feuille, and of which I may have to mention some other examples. But with this single exception the story is nearly faultless. The art—difficult to reproduce in excerpts—by which Julia's succumbing to her fatal passion is depicted, is admirable, and not less admirable is that which saves Lucan from the proverbial fate of the man in whose case ladies are willing. He is virtuous without being *niais*: and his total lack of coxcombry gives him a remarkable advantage over

the average French novel hero. . Most remarkable of all, however, are the perfect proportion and scenic arrangements of ^{OCTAVE} ^{FEUILLET.} the piece. The parts of the minor personages are adjusted to a wonderful nicety, and in no novel known to me are the character and quantity of the descriptions so excellently proportioned. In pathos of a certain kind *Julia de Trécœur* yields among modern works of the class only to *La Petite Comtesse*.'

Strikingly different in plan and in sources of interest is *Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*, to which must, I suppose, if comparative freedom from faults be taken as the characteristic of a masterpiece, be awarded that position among M. Feuillet's works. It is autobiographic in form. The hero at the age of thirty finds himself left heir to the title of Marquis and to the remains of a singularly embarrassed fortune. He is like many of M. Feuillet's heroes and heroines, the son of an angelic mother and a spendthrift father. The latter has so thoroughly dissipated his fortune and that of his wife, that at the settlement of affairs, which is confided to an old notary and family friend, M. Laubépin, a balance of some two thousand pounds on the wrong side is all that remains out of a fortune of a hundred times the amount for the young Marquis and his sister Hélène, who is twenty years his junior. When making this dismal announcement, the notary adds that he has a deposit of jewels, which had been

made secretly by the young man's foreseeing mother, and which need not therefore be sacrificed. But the new Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive does not thus understand honour, and he insists that the creditors shall be paid in full, the deposit giving the means of doing this. The question is then, How he shall maintain himself and his sister? M. Laubépin has several suggestions to offer. A speculator will be only too glad of the Marquis's old name as a bait for his prospectus, and offer a round number of paid-up shares in return. But this does not suit the Marquis any more than the retention of the deposit; nor has the proposition of a rich merchant's daughter, who will be delighted with the title of Marquise, any better success. The consultation thereupon terminates, M. Laubépin appearing to be rather pleased than otherwise by the rejection of his offers. It is understood that he is to settle the matter, to pay over the few pounds which may be left, and to look out for some situation which may at least promise bread to his client.

For a time the young man—Maxime is his name—hears nothing of his lawyer, and being totally destitute of ready money he is on the brink of starvation. He tries to eat the leaves of the trees in the parks, he visits his little sister in her convent, and by immense good fortune carries off, under pretext of giving it to a deserving person, a huge slice of bread which she cannot eat. At

last he ~~nearly gives in~~, and is only saved by the charity of the porter's wife at his lodgings, who has formerly been OCTAVE
FEUILLET. in his service, and who cajoles him into accepting a dinner. Then M. Laubépin, who has been on a country visit, returns, and after upbraiding his client and *protégé* for not informing him of his condition, proceeds to inform him of certain things moderately to his advantage. He has procured him the refusal of an appointment as land-steward to a rich family in Brittany at a fair salary, and besides this he has succeeded in saving about a thousand pounds by legitimate means out of the wrecked inheritance. The worst is therefore past.

The family honoured with this rather singular land-steward consists of an old sailor and privateersman, who has amassed a great fortune long before in the wars of the Empire, of his widowed daughter-in-law, a creole lady of eccentric but amiable character, and of her only child Marguerite. The grandfather is very old, and practically in his dotage. His family receive the Marquis (who has adopted his family name Odier, as a more suitable travelling title) very amiably, and he is installed in a separate dwelling, being, however, frequently invited to join the circle at the château. The chief frequenters of this circle are, besides an aunt, Madame Aubry, and a young ex-governess, Mademoiselle Helouin, the doctor of the district, and a certain M. de Bévallan, a

gentleman of great estate in the neighbourhood,
for whom Maxime conceives a decided
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He soon becomes rather a mystery to the inmates of the castle, reserved as his situation necessarily makes him. They cannot understand how a land-steward should know all about fashionable matters not only in Paris, but in foreign capitals and courts, and (which seems more odd to an Englishman) they cannot understand his being a good rider. His accomplishments in these respects even create a certain doubt in Madame Laroque's mind as to his professional capacities, until this doubt is removed by his handing over to her on the renewal of a farmer's lease the premium which his predecessor had always been accustomed silently to pocket. His incognito is also partially betrayed by an old Breton lady who conceives a great fancy for him. This is Mademoiselle de Porhöet, an ancient dame whose possessions are almost limited to blood of the bluest and to a literal Château en Espagne, that is to say, a claim on a vast Spanish property, which she has never been able to establish.

Meanwhile Marguerite Laroque, the daughter and heiress of the house, is a greater mystery to Maxime than he himself is to his employers. She is very beautiful, and not specially inclined to treat him haughtily. It is obvious that the rich M. de Bévallan is ready to be her very humble servant. But she seems to labour under some undefined

cause of melancholy, and is almost ostentatious in proclaiming her disgust for things in general. She, too, is a great favourite with Mademoiselle de Porhöet, and one day the two meet at their friend's house.

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When the talkative old lady had finished her reminiscence, Marguerite kissed her, and waking her dog Mervyn, who slept at her feet, she said that she must go back to the château. I made no scruple of setting out at the same time, sure that I was not likely to cause her any annoyance. Setting aside the insignificance of my person and my position in the young lady's eyes, she is not at all disturbed at the idea of a tête-à-tête, her mother having resolutely brought her up in the same liberal fashion in which she herself had been educated in the English West Indian Islands. The English method, as is well known, gives to women before marriage all the independence with which we wisely refuse to entrust them until an abuse of it becomes irreparable. We went out of the garden, therefore, together. I held her stirrup while she mounted, and we set out. After a few steps she said, "It seems to me that I disturbed you very unseasonably. You were enjoying a tête-à-tête."—"Yes, mademoiselle, I was; but as it had already lasted some time I forgive you, and, indeed, am rather obliged to you."—"You are very kind to our poor neighbour.—My mother is quite grateful to you for it."—"And your mother's daughter?" said I, smiling. "Oh, for my part I am more difficult to move. If you want me to admire you, you must wait a little longer. I am not in the habit of hastily judging human actions, which have generally more than one aspect. Your behaviour to Mademoiselle de Porhöet looks well, I admit—but—" she hesitated, shook her head, and went on in a serious, bitter, and indeed insulting tone—"but I am not quite sure that you are not paying court to her in hopes of becoming her heir." I could feel myself grow pale. However, reflecting on the absurdity of taking the high tone with a young girl, I restrained myself, and answered gravely,

"Allow me to say, mademoiselle, that I am sincerely sorry for you." She looked much surprised. "You are

OCTAVE sorry for me, sir?"—"Yes, mademoiselle; you
FEUILLET. must permit me to express to you the respectful pity which you seem to me to deserve."

"Pity!" she said, reining in her horse, and turning slowly upon me eyes half closed with disdain; "I am so unfortunate as not to understand you."—"Yet it is very plain, mademoiselle. If disbelief in good, mistrust, and a seared heart are the bitterest fruits of lifelong experience, nothing in the world better deserves compassion than the same feelings in the heart of one whose experience of life has not begun." "Sir," replied Mademoiselle Laroque, with a briskness very different from her usual manner, "you do not know what you are talking about, and," she added severely, "you forget to whom you are talking."—"That is quite true, mademoiselle," said I, bowing. "I am speaking a little at random, and I am forgetting a little to whom I am speaking. But you have set me the example in both points." Mademoiselle Marguerite, with her eyes fixed on the tree-tops, said to me with haughty irony, "Must I beg your pardon?"—"Certainly, mademoiselle," I replied, "if one of us has a pardon to beg it is you. You are rich and I am poor; you can stoop, I cannot." There was a silence, and the working of her countenance told of an inward struggle. Suddenly lowering her whip in guise of a salute, she said, "Well, then, pardon me." And with that she struck her horse sharply and set off at a gallop, leaving me alone.

Mademoiselle Marguerite, however, bears no malice, and the next interview which she has with the steward is a water excursion in which they are accompanied only by an old man-servant. They journey up the neighbouring river, Maxime having an opportunity of displaying his prowess by rescuing her dog and her pocket-handkerchief from the water. Soon afterwards, as if on purpose, she

takes M. de Bévallan to the same spot, and makes him renew the experience, which he does with hardly so happy a result. OCTAVE
FEUILLET. The discomfiture of her lover does not disconcert her, for soon afterwards Maxime learns that the gentleman is all but accepted. Marguerite herself tells him the reason. She has a morbid dread of fortune-hunters, and has made up her mind not to accept any one whose fortune is not fairly equal to her own. As if matters were not sufficiently complicated, Maxime at this juncture learns that Bévallan has been carrying on an intrigue with the governess, Made-moiselle Helouin, and the latter, after making a violent effort to entangle the steward also, throws him a formal declaration of war, asserting that she knows who he is, and that M. Laubépin has sent him to the Château Laroque in hopes of mending his broken fortunes by a marriage with the heiress. This view, with embellishments, she communicates to Marguerite, and that suspicious damsel takes fire at once. She publicly insults Maxime by giving him orders as if he were a menial, and only a certain inspiration of Bévallan's prevents an open quarrel between the two men. This storm past, another soon occurs, for the governess still has Marguerite's ear. Accident conducts her with Maxime to the ruins of the Tower of Elven, known to all wanderers in Brittany, and accident locks them in the ruins together. After he has in vain tried to force the door, the young lady has one of

her ordinary hallucinations. It occurs to her that the Marquis (as she knows Maxime to be) has planned this for the purpose of compromising her, and she addresses him in the most outrageous language. Exasperated by this, and determined at any cost to show her the injustice of her suspicions, he swings himself from the top of the tower on to the branch of a tree, and reaches the ground with a broken arm but alive. Then he mounts his horse and manages to reach home, where he puts the household on Marguerite's track without indicating what has passed, and she is rescued without any one knowing that she has had a companion. After this, events march rapidly, as indeed they are bound to do. Maxime, in ransacking the family archives as a preliminary of the marriage contract, discovers that old Laroque's fortune was begun by a fraud upon his own ancestors. M. de Bévallan, dissatisfied with the provisions of the settlement, disgusts his irritable fiancée so much that she breaks off the engagement. The governess is unmasked and banished, and lastly, Mademoiselle de Porhöet, having gained her Spanish castle by Maxime's instrumentality, dies, leaving him heir to a fortune which enables him to marry any one he pleases. It is needless to say whom he does marry; but the reader will probably be of opinion that unless Marguerite as a wife was rather less suspicious and, rather more placid in temper than she was as a maiden, the

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Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive must have made a very dubious bargain. It is only fair to the author, however, to say, OCTAVE
FEUILLET. that this impression is much less vividly produced on the reader of the book than on the reader of an abstract of it. It is another dramatic peculiarity of M. Feuille's books that they do not lend themselves to abstract. As in the case of a drama, it is possible to give a mere argument of them, or simply to extract scenes, but scarcely to represent them in little.

In estimating this author's work it is well to remember that he did not make his appearance early as a novelist. Even after he had done so his best known writings were of the class known to readers of French under the titles of *Proverbes* and *Scènes*—trifles dramatic in form and narrative in substance, of which most Frenchmen of letters in our day have written some, Alfred de Musset's being perhaps the best known. M. Feuille's first prose tale which he cared to republish later was, I believe, *Onestá*, which appeared in 1848, when the author was approaching middle life. It is a Venetian story of the rather extravagant order which had been for some time popular—a story of daggers, love, wine, duels, assignations, and all the rest of it. It displays the literary skill which is rarely wanting in its author's work, but does not appear to me to possess much interest. After some years appeared *Bellah*, an effort in another kind. This is a story

of the Vendean, or, to speak more correctly, the Chouan, contest, the particular episode being dated just before the Quiberon expedition. Here, too, there is more promise than performance, the central interest being very small and coming to a decidedly premature conclusion. No such charge can be brought against *La Petite Comtesse*, which was published about the same time. The story of this novelette is very simple and very sad. A man of letters, past his youth, goes down on a government mission to make drawings of an ancient abbey. Chance throws him into the society of a neighbouring country house, the moving spirit of which is the Comtesse de Palme, a type of the fast young lady of the Second Empire. The hero feels and expresses a deep contempt and pity for her brainlessness, and this little aversion brings them together. She makes advances to him, and he, though hardly aware of it, becomes deeply in love with her. But he has convinced himself that her passion is a mere passing fancy, and that both would repent their union, and so he steadily repulses her. The reaction throws her into the arms of the most worthless of her admirers; but she soon repents and dies, the too-wise lover falling soon after by the hand of his temporarily successful rival. This is the only novel in which M. Feuillet has in my judgment been wholly successful. The pity of it is the one thought that occurs to the reader, and the infatuation which prevents two

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people who love each other from being happy is not felt as a drawback. In *La Petite Comtesse* M. Feuillet indicates his theory OCTAVE
FEUILLET. as to the causes of feminine weakness and insufficiency in France ; in the *Histoire de Sibylle* (his part of a curious novel-duel with George Sand) he develops it. Sibylle is an orphan brought up by her grandparents and an Irish governess, Miss O'Neil, in drawing whom M. Feuillet permits himself to indulge in much dubious wit. The orphan is the type, we may suppose, of what young ladies ought to be, and if this be so we can hardly wonder that she excited protests. She is a very religious young lady, and at an early age is caught offering violets at the altar of an unknown god in the woods. She abandons Catholicism because the parish priest sometimes goes to sleep after dinner, and returns to it (converting Miss O'Neil) because he leaves off coffee and becomes strongly ascetic. Then she goes to Paris and plays good angel to her other grandparents, a couple who live in orthodox estrangement from one another. Here she meets her fate, Raoul de Férias, a gentleman who is the object of the desires of all his married lady friends. All is going well, when Sibylle suddenly faints at hearing Raoul make profession of infidelity at a dinner-party. After some trouble, however, she converts him also and then dies.

M. Feuillet's latest [1878] books—for of *Julia de Trécœur*, the *Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*,

and *M. de Camors*, enough has been or will be said—are *Un Mariage dans le Monde* and *Les Amours de Philippe*. OCTAVE FEUILLET. *Un Mariage dans le Monde* is a clever and amusing book, again illustrating the author's views on the conjugal state. The husband is vexed because his wife confuses the eighth and eighteenth centuries, the wife because her husband does not like her gaities. The result is a tacit agreement that each shall go his and her own way. This of course means danger, and the danger is only averted by the devotion of a friend, M. de Kévern, who saves Madame de Rias from herself. The most amusing thing in the book to an English reader is the cause of the indignation with which M. de Rias's excellent mother-in-law regards him. Unfortunately the very difference of manners which makes this amusing prevents it from being more distinctly alluded to. *Les Amours de Philippe* tells the old story of a young man for whom a cousin is destined, who rejects her in order to follow the example of the prodigal son, and who returns after many days to the slighted maiden. The interval is taken up by two great passions. The first is for an actress, Mary Gerald, who accepts Philippe under the notion that he is a great dramatic poet, and very promptly deserts him when his piece is damned. The second is for Madame de Talyas, the wife of his commander in the war of 1870. In this case it is the lady who

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insists upon being fallen in love with. Philippe is finally extracted from her clutches by the bravery and devotion of his cousin Jeanne, with whom and with a comfortable fortune the scarcely deserving young man is at length rewarded.

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I have already noted in *Julia de Trécœur* a curious instance of what may perhaps be called obliviscence on M. Feuillet's part. There are two other instances of similar false notes in his work, which are even more fatal, because, instead of occurring at the end of the book, where the interest is, so to speak, secured and beyond danger of destruction, they occur in its course. One of these is in *M. de Camors*—the scene, to wit, in which Madame de Télec, rejecting Camors's love, proposes as a compensation that she shall educate her daughter as a wife for him. Here again the preposterous takes a touch of the revolting. The topsyturvification, to use a word which Thackeray invented under the inspiration of this very form of literature, becomes altogether too strong. From that moment the reasonable reader holds Madame de Télec responsible for Camors's future aberrations, and when they arrive he has nothing to say to her but *Tu l'as voulu*. Again in the *Histoire de Sibylle* there is a passage which rings false in a somewhat similar way. The wicked heroine Clotilde has set her cap at the hero, has failed; and to console herself has enchanted—to the utmost limits of enchantment

—his scientific and impassible friend Grandrax.

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FEUILLET. But she tires of Grandrax, as she does of most things, and what is the method which she takes to rid herself of this light of science? First of all she caresses her husband in his presence in a very offensive manner, and when he asks for an explanation, she informs him that she has never loved him, that his dictatorial manner is odious to her, and that he had better go. He goes, takes laudanum, and expires, gesticulating and making gruesome remarks, as if he had wished to add one more to the deathbeds of the *philosophes*. The reader of the scenes ought to be impressed, but he is not. He gathers from them only the notion that M. Feuillet, unlike the Laureate's Madeline, is far from perfect in love lore. Clotilde is certainly a vulgar vixen, and her husband is an unfortunate person. But the lover has, in nautical phrase, the weather-gage of both. He is long past the stage of being jealous of the husband, and to the lady herself he can reply that if she did not love him, so much the worse for her. In both these cases the false note is fatal to the interest of the following portions of the book.

There is yet a third charge which I must make against M. Feuillet. Skilful draughtsman as he is in many ways, he rarely attains to the drawing of a really representative character. In *Julia de Trécœur* and in *La Petite Comtesse* he is not far from this success, but he does not quite attain it.

In his other characters he misses it altogether. It may seem a paradox, but is not so, that the portrayer of a strong individuality always at the same time, whether he knows it or not, creates a type. M. Feuillet never portrays a strong individuality, and therefore he never creates a type.¹ His most elaborate attempt at this is of course *M. de Camors*. Camors is intended to be a sort of Marlborough of private life, a man who utilises and enjoys everybody, who hates and loves nobody, who simply *exploits* the human race. His failure in his plan would not interfere with this conception. Failure in such a plan is pretty nearly certain, and the representation of it is moral to boot. But he not only fails, but fails ludicrously, fails so as to make his plan a mere absurdity. He has only to meet a Lescande, a Madame de Télec, a General de Campvallou, and he compromises himself at once after the fashion of a schoolboy. He is worse than the *fanfaron des vices qu'il n'a pas*, he is the *fanfaron des vices qu'il ne peut pas avoir*, a much more contemptible being. Except in his connection with Madame de Campvallou, where, guilty as he is, he is the victim of a greater and nobler viciousness than his own, he is a painful mixture of coxcomb and prig.

It is, in fact, in the choice and conception of

¹ Unless an exception be made for the heroine of *La Morte*, a book written nearly ten years after the text appeared. See below on it and her.

his characters that M. Feuillet's weakness consists, just as his strength consists in the choice and conception of the framework and minor incidents of his stories.

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It is impossible to lay down offhand the principle that such and such a type of character is unfitted for a hero or a heroine. If the type is rendered sufficiently faithfully and sufficiently forcibly, if it is, in Spinosian phrase, brought *sub specie æternitatis*, that is sufficient. From this point of view, though Lord Foppington and Lady Booby are certainly not persons of much moral worth or weight, they conquer their place, a place far indeed from Hamlet and Rosalind, but in the same gallery and on the same line. M. Feuillet has contributed no single character of this kind, and the cause is clear. He has not been able to conceive any such contribution. His characters generally have indeed very singular antecedents. Their author is on the one hand strongly impressed by the society, by the prevalent tastes, and by the ordinary views of morality which he sees around him; in the second place, he is desirous, and very creditably desirous, of fighting on virtue's side rather than on the side of vice; lastly, he has, though fitfully and at intervals, the artistic impulse of working with a view to nothing but the goodness of the work. These motives, each operating separately, might have each produced something really good. His power of observation, his knowledge of what

would interest his readers, his theory of the principles which ought to guide life, and his mastery of the art of writing books, are all good, but each seems to trip up the other. He tries to make his heroines fascinatingly sinful and at the same time improvingly moral. The result is that they do not fascinate and that they do not edify us. The term *honnête femme* is always on his lips when he is describing their temptations. But as one of his French critics remarks with admirable bluntness, "Une honnête femme n'a pas de ces tentations." So also is it with his heroes. They stand shivering on the bank, hesitating between the "I dare not" of their honour and the "I would" of their inclination, until when, as they always do at length, they take the plunge, we have no feeling left for them but rather wearied contempt. M. Feuillet cannot draw a strong immoral character because of his ideas of morality; he cannot draw a strong moral character because of the hankering which he feels after a certain class and kind of interest, maudlin not to say immoral; and he cannot write a book which is interesting merely as a book, because of the preoccupations which these different motives cause him. Once, and once only, he has got quite out of his toils and worked with free hands, and the result is *La Petite Comtesse*. Again in *Julia de Trécœur* a study of real power is produced. It has been thought by some people that the style of analytic novel-

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writing is after all not his forte, and that he would have done better to follow
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in *Bellah* and in *Onesté*. I do not

myself see in these books any promise of greater excellence than that which he has elsewhere attained. As a novelist, and it is as a novelist only that I am speaking of him, M. Feuillet seems to me to have had the thus far and no further set before him very clearly. He has undeniable talent, talent so considerable as frequently to appear greater than it really is, and to excite, even in those who estimate it correctly, astonishment that he has done no better. But he is limited. He walks over his dubious and hollow ground with dainty but uncertain step, and declines altogether to pierce to the accepted hells beneath. His vogue, such as it is, appears to be due in part no doubt to real merits of style and workmanship, but still more to his curious sentimental compound of propriety and impropriety, to his faculty of treating dubious subjects in a tone of the strictest virtue, and to his amiable weakness for excusing the sinner, and making him interesting, while shaking his head very gravely over the sin. It is consoling, perhaps, to some people to meet with a teacher of undoubted morality who is so thoroughly convinced that offences must needs come, and so well skilled in making the offender amiable. To other people, however, this tone is not agreeable, and they do not find in it

an excuse for the shortcomings of these novels considered as works of art.

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So far I had written in 1878 when M. Feuillet, though his career as a novelist under his own name was far shorter than that of some of his contemporaries, was already well stricken in years. In the interval which has passed since, he has added steadily, though not voluminously, to his total, producing one story, *La Morte*, of immense popularity and of merit nearly sufficient to rank it with the two above singled out, some others—*Le Journal d'une Femme*, *Histoire d'une Parisienne*, *Honneur d'Artiste*—of great merit, and some half narrative, half dramatic work, such as *Le Divorce de Juliette*. Absolutely he has advanced upon rather than fallen back from his previous achievements: relatively his advance is even greater. For during these twelve years his only elder rivals of the first class, MM. Sandeau and Flaubert, have died, the extravagances of the Naturalist school, which were only beginning in 1878, have reached their climax, and the art of writing French has steadily declined. To read, therefore, books such as *La Morte* or *Honneur d'Artiste*, after reading *L'Immortel* or *La Bête Humaine*, gives them an advantage which was not possessed by, say, *Julia de Trécœur*, in respect of, say, *Madame Bovary*. But it would not be fair to deduct too largely from M. Feuillet's merit on the score of the inferiority of his competitors. In

Honneur d'Artiste, indeed, his latest work, something of the old failings noticed above recurs together with much of the spirited and malicious portraiture and the real pathos there praised. With an unusual survival of the faculty of observation, M. Feuillet has satirised the Americanised young lady of the France of to-day and the *fin-de-siècle* young man quite as smoothly and with as little of mere senile fault-finding as when thirty years ago he whisked his whip about the ears of their fathers and mothers. He has added to his gallery of imperfect but striking character sketches in the heroine. Yet, as of old, she is imperfect: not in morals merely (most of us are that), but in art. No one can say that Beatrice de Sardonne, a damsel of high degree but tocherless, might not be, by the machinations of a cruel old baroness, who plays on her sense of honour, induced to refuse the said baroness's nephew, the Marquis de Pierrepont, who loves her; that she would not have married, half from pique, half from esteem, the painter Jacques Fabrice, Pierrepont's friend; that she and the marquis might not afterwards have experienced that sudden and fatal forgetfulness of all but love, which a pleasant English poet has cruelly enshrined in unforgettable verse in regard to an English hero and heroine. Nor is the suicide of Fabrice, when he discovers the fact, and when, to avoid the scandal of a duel, the lot falls on him, impossible, nor even the too-late discovery of

Beatrice herself that she loves him and not her lover. Separately each of these things is conceivable, and it is not at all impossible that an artist, even that this artist, might have made them conceivable in combination. But, to my taste at any rate, M. Feuillet has not done this. His old theory of what I have called the caducity of woman has prevented him from seeing that his Beatrice de Sardonne would not have fallen as he makes her fall, that, had she done it at all, she would have done it in a different way, and so the sense of "topsyturvification" returns.

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La Morte is a very different book, and whatever may be the final verdict pronounced on it, makes a great addition to its author's titles to fame. Like some of his earlier work, and even more directly, it is a polemic against the modern spirit; for M. Feuillet, it must be remembered, is always professedly, and I think in perfectly genuine intention, on the side of the angels. The hero, M. de Vaudricourt, a French gentleman neither better nor worse than most, or perhaps a little better, marries Aliette de Courteheuse, one of those *anges de candeur* who rather irritate the English reader. At their country house they meet an aged scientific person, M. Tallevaut, with his niece Sabine. Sabine is a young person of great attractions, who has been brought up by her uncle, a freethinker, with a total absence of the ordinary moral and religious education. Bernard de Vaudricourt and she fall violently in love with each other, but as he still

loves his wife, Sabine calmly poisons Aliette, and soon afterwards marries the widower, after a violent and vigorous scene, at which she pits her uncle's teaching against his reproaches. Vaudricourt's punishment (though he has no suspicion of the crime) is not long delayed. Sabine quickly tires of him, and is logically impartial in her disregard of the commandments. Only after the discovery of his disgrace does he discover that Aliette had been murdered. The plot, it will be seen, is very simple, and may, even by those who sympathise with M. Feuillet's point of view, be regarded as a little extravagant. The tendency of agnostic morality in Sabine is certainly exaggerated, and the book is too full of preachings of various kinds. It may even be contended by some who push to an extreme the notion that M. Feuillet cannot draw a whole character, that his Sabine confuses rather than blends the characteristics of a ruthless "philosophess" and of a mere vulgar feminine aspirant after riches and pleasures. Still it is undeniable that she is, as French slang has it, a "person," and that the central situation of the book is strong, obviously led up to, and strongly worked out, while it is as admirably written as all M. Feuillet's work is. No one of all the younger generations, excepting M. de Maupassant, has produced anything that can vie with it for combination of interest and style.

X

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

(1878¹)

IN a letter to Sainte-Beuve, expostulating with the great critic for his judgment on *Salammbô*, the author asks the judge, GUSTAVE
FLAUBERT. "Étes-vous bien sûr d'abord de n'avoir pas obéi un peu trop à votre impression nerveuse ? L'objet de mon livre vous déplaît *en soi*." Perhaps Flaubert, having been early put on his defence by the prosecution of *Madame Bovary*, was a little too prone to be piqued at criticism. But it is hardly doubtful that the feeling which, as he thinks, prejudiced even Sainte-Beuve, is one against which the critical reader of his books has to be decidedly on his guard. Both *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô* are very apt to produce the unfavourable nervous impression of which he speaks ; *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, with its unbroken presentment of meanness, feebleness, irresolution, vice without glamour, and virtue without charm,

¹ See Preface.

is open to the same charge ; and though I myself consider *La Tentation de Saint Antqine* attractive in the very highest degree, GUSTAVE FLAUBERT. I do not know that this is a general opinion. Of the three short stories published later *La Légende de Saint Julien* is, I should think, beyond reproach, and *Un Cœur Simple* almost equally so ; but *Hérodias* is, in defects as well as merits, almost a replica on a small scale of *Salammbô*. The posthumous and uncompleted *Bouvard et Pécuchet* never received a final passing through the alembic from its author, and it is not certain that even he could ever have effected that operation. But as it is, the most ardent Flaubertist of intelligence must acknowledge that it is *rudis indigestaque moles* ; and that the "vanity of vanities" of its survey of almost all possible literary, scientific, and practical occupations is not only depressing in the highest degree, but almost unrelieved by the satire of the earlier work. Thus it happens that the reader of this very singular novelist has to win his pleasure at the cost of a considerable effort. Like Saint Julian himself, he has to endure repulsiveness in order to gain the subsequent charm, and even when that charm is gained it is, perhaps, rather the charm of exquisite literature than that of perfect fiction.

One thing that distinguishes Flaubert in these days of easy writing is his determined and conscientious patience of workmanship. The short list of books I have already given represents

—if we add the unimportant comedy *Le Candidat* —the whole of his published work, excepting letters, and yet from the first appearance of fragments of the *Tentation* to his death was more than thirty years. Even Thackeray's allowance of two years for the writing of a good novel sinks into insignificance beside this almost Horatian reticence. Flaubert, a man of sixty when he died, had in his lifetime produced about twice as much as one of our quarterly novelists accomplishes in a twelve-month ; but then Flaubert's work is work which a man may be proud of at the close of a lifetime spent upon it, and the quarterly novelist's work is work which, if it cost as many minutes as it has hours, would still have deserved the Æschylean verdict—

μόχθος περισσὸς κουφόνους τ' εὐηθία.

It has sometimes been thought—in my judgment erroneously—that much of the character of Flaubert's work was determined by the prosecution of his first book. I believe there is now no difference of opinion about the injustice, as well as the unwisdom of that prosecution. *Madame Bovary* is, I frankly admit, a repulsive book in more ways than one ; but I should as soon think of calling a Dance of Death or a Last Judgment immoral, as of applying that epithet to it. An American critic—Mr. Henry James—has pleasantly suggested that it might make a useful Sunday School tract, and Mr. James is a person who is (or was) wont to speak with all the

sternness of New England concerning any transgression of the proprieties. But I do not think that the author was at all induced by the fate of this first book to aim at topping his part in the effort to obtain successes of scandal. It has always struck me that the outcry over *Salammbô* arose mainly from the determination of the public to be shocked, and its disappointment at finding nothing to shock it. As for *L'Éducation Sentimentale*—in 1840 or thereabouts it would have been entitled *Physiologie de l'Homme Manqué*—there is little enough to scandalise anybody in that vast treasure of pitiless observation, and the *Trois Contes* contains next to nothing that can be called bravado. Scarcely so much can be said of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, but of that later. Flaubert, before the abundant personal revelations which followed his death, gave me the impression of a man of saturnine temperament, who happened to combine in very unusual measure the observing with the imagining faculty, and who probably developed himself with hardly any reference to the opinion of the public or the critics about his successive developments. Nor have those revelations altered my opinion. His work is all worthy of attention, and its extent, fortunately, enables me to give some detailed notice of all of it here.

It is a peculiarity of Flaubert that he was not merely a little-writing but a late-writing novelist. Some fragments of *La Tentation de*

Saint Antoine, which was not in its entirety to be published till long afterwards, appeared in *L'Artiste* at the time when Gautier GUSTAVE FLAUBERT. edited it, more than twenty years earlier.

But *Madame Bovary* was not given to the world until its author had passed the half-way house of his threescore years and ten. It appeared at first in the *Revue de Paris*, and in this publication some unwise omissions were made, notwithstanding the author's protest. Omissions have the force of asterisks—they are simply provocatives to the prurient; and *Madame Bovary* found itself greeted with a "*fie fie*" almost before it was in the hands of the public. Now it so happened that the Second Empire was just at this time very anxious to justify its famous boasts as to the glorification of religion and the guardianship of the family. *Madame Bovary* was thought to be a proper object of its holy zeal, and was prosecuted accordingly. The proceedings are appended to the later editions of the book. M. Flaubert was luckier than Baudelaire, for he escaped with a gentle censure. An incident of this kind influences the future of a book in the eyes of almost all readers, and of all critics but a very few. But I need say no more about it, except to reiterate what I have already said, that the prosecution is now defended by nobody. The second title is *Mœurs de Province*, and the two between them describe more accurately than is the wont of titles the contents. On the one side it is an analytical

description of a new Harlot's Progress; the history of the fall and punishment of a woman who happens to unite strong aspirations after luxury, in both senses of the word, with a superficial sensibility, an utter heartlessness, and an incurable vulgarity of mind. On the other it is a minute account from the outside of the pettinesses of provincial life, recounted not ill-naturedly or satirically, for Flaubert is the most impersonal and passionless of writers, but with fidelity and indifference, which are quite as ruthless as any satire.

Emma Rouault is the daughter of a farmer of the Pays de Caux in Normandy, who is a widower. He is able to live in a kind of sluttish plenty, and withal to have his daughter educated at a convent. Here she acquires a reasonable measure of accomplishments and a still greater measure of sensibility in its eighteenth-century meaning. She reads endless romances and keepsakes, and dreams the usual dreams of girlhood, except that her dreams are apt to concentrate themselves much more upon Prince Charming's pomp and magnificence than upon his personal characteristics. At last her father takes her to the farm, and she subsides for a time into the uncongenial occupations of the housewife. All things considered, it is of course natural that she should marry the first man that asks her, and it so happens that her father, who is in no position to furnish her with a good *dot*, is not at all inclined to make

any objections. The suitor is, as fate will have it, the doctor of the district, one Charles Bovary. He is a young man and not bad-looking, but hopelessly commonplace and uninteresting, with barely brains enough to enable him to scrape through his examinations and start himself as a general practitioner. He has already been once married, young as he is; for his mother, who altogether disposes of him, has chosen him a wife as she has chosen him a profession. But this wife is dead, and he now, having been thrown by chance in Emma's way, thinks of choosing for himself. They are married, and the description of the wedding guests is an early example of Flaubert's peculiar style and power. Then Emma goes to live with the most honest, most affectionate, and most stupid of men, whose delicacy is pretty well gauged by his leaving the withered wedding bouquet of his dead wife to greet her successor as an ornament of the conjugal chamber. He is on his part more than satisfied with his bargain, and enjoys the same sort of quiet animal felicity as that which possesses a ruminating cow. With Emma, as it may be supposed, things are different. She has married in expectation of all the mysterious delights of which her romances have told her, and as she altogether fails to experience them, she is at first a good deal puzzled. Of such puzzlement there can be only one end, and she gradually begins to hate her husband, to watch with a sort of

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fascinated aversion his unrefined ways, his slovenly habits, his stupid and commonplace remarks. She is absolutely without society. Her home is in that marvel

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of dreary untidiness, an average French village, and she is one of those women who are always dull without excitement. The climax is put to it all by a casual visit to a neighbouring château, whither the pair are invited with a view to electioneering matters. The dinner, the ball, the costly furniture, the viscounts and dukes, the champagne, and the Persic apparatus generally, are too much for Emma. Her merely passive dulness changes to an active rage because she has not all these things which the great ladies have; and happening to pick up an embroidered cigar-case which one of the visitors has dropped, she preserves it as a kind of fetish, a relic of the luxury and excitement from which she is debarred. At last she becomes seriously ill, and Bovary, who adores her in his stupid way, is prevailed upon to remove from Tostes, where they have been living, and where he has got together a fair practice, to Yonville, in another district, a larger place and within reach of Rouen. Here Madame Bovary's moral malady is not long in coming to a crisis. A neighbouring squireen, a coarse brute enough, whom she takes for a model cavalier, soon perceives that the pear is ripe, and at his first touch it drops. For a time Emma persuades herself that she is happy, and indulges in the wildest

eccentricities in order to build up her romance. She is gradually disenchanted, and at last, trying to lash herself into fresh excitement, she suggests elopement.

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But Rodolphe, the lover, has not the least intention of saddling himself with such a burden. The revulsion is, of course, violent, and the usual devotional reaction sets in. But the excellent country priest to whom she has before her transgression tried to explain her spiritual state, is as unwilling and as unable to play the part of spiritual healer as an old-fashioned English parson, and cannot for the life of him make out her drift. "If she is ill at ease," he had asked her at her first confidence, "why doesn't she ask her husband to prescribe for her?" So Emma is not long in returning to her first works. A lawyer's clerk, with whom she had a platonic flirtation before the days of Rodolphe, reappears, and a second liaison is entered upon as rashly as the first, and carried on almost more shamelessly. All this time she has been as extravagant as she has been unfaithful. A cunning village tradesman has got her completely in his clutches. She has obtained from her foolish husband a power of attorney, and has signed bill after bill, until the whole amount is, to her, immense. Payment is suddenly demanded. She tries her old lover in vain; her new one, frightened at the proposals she makes to him that he shall embezzle the money, leaves her, and she is equally unsuccessful with the

people she knows in Yonville, though she descends to the lowest means of persuasion. . At last in despair she poisons herself with arsenic, and expires in horrible torments.

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Her husband is totally ruined, but this is nothing in his eyes compared with the loss of her. He neglects his practice, sinks into poverty, and only when he is utterly broken down discovers her treachery by chance. This is the last blow, and he dies of a broken heart, while the one child of the miserable pair becomes a factory-hand.

I never myself read *Madame Bovary* without thinking of another masterpiece of French fiction ; and I have no doubt that the comparison has occurred to others also. *Madame Bovary* and *Manon Lescaut* are both histories of women whose conduct no theory of morality, however lax, can possibly excuse. Both are brought to ruin by their love of material luxury. Both are not only immoral, but cruelly unfaithful to men who in different ways are perfectly true and faithful to them. Both perish miserably, not in either case without repentance. Why does Emma Bovary repel while Manon Lescaut irresistibly attracts us ? I think the answer is to be found in the ignoble character of the former as compared with Manon. The mistress of Desgrieux loves wealth, splendour, sensuous gratification of all sorts, for themselves, with a kind of artistic passion. They are the first necessity to her, and everything else comes second to this passionate devotion. On the other hand,

Madame Bovary sets up lovers, spends her husband's money, cheats and deceives him, because it seems to her the proper thing to do. Her countesses and duchesses all had lovers' and gorgeous garments, so she must have gorgeous garments and lovers too. Her first reflection after transgressing is almost comic—"J'ai un amant!" She has a sort of Dogberry-like conviction that a pretty woman ought to have a lover and everything handsome about her, the same sort of conviction which more harmlessly leads her English sisters to be miserable if they have not a drawing-room with a couch and chairs, and a chimney-glass, and gilt books on the table. Her excesses come from a variety of feminine snobbery, and are not prompted by any frank passion or desire.

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The reproach usually brought against the book is that it is too dreary, and that there is not a sufficient contrast of goodness and good humour to relieve the sombre hue of the picture. I believe myself that the author felt this, and that he intended to supply such a contrast in the person of M. Homais, the apothecary of Yonville. It has been suggested that Homais is not intended to be favourably drawn, but I think that this is a mistake. Homais has indeed the slight touch of charlatanism which half-educated and naturally shrewd men, whose lot is cast among people wholly uneducated and mostly stupid, often acquire. But he is an unconscious humbug, and not a bad fellow as the

world goes, besides being intensely amusing.

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Much of the amusement, indeed, results from the impassibly saturnine way in which Flaubert directs even the gambols of his puppets. This impassibility is the great feature, as I have said, of all his books, and notably of this. The stupid commonplaceness of Charles Bovary's youth, the sordid dulness of his earlier married life, the more graceful dulness of the second, the humours of a county gathering and agricultural show at Yonville, the two liaisons with the vulgar *roué* squire and the dapper lawyer's clerk, the steps of Emma's financial entanglement, the clumsy operation by which Bovary attempts to cure a clubfoot, the horrors of the heroine's deathbed, and the quieter misery of her husband's end, are all told with the material accuracy of a photograph and the artistic accuracy of a great picture. As a specimen of the style I may quote the passage in which Emma's first conscious awakening to her mistake in marrying Bovary is described :—

She began by gazing all round to see if nothing had changed since her last visit. The foxgloves and the wall-flowers were in the same places, the clumps of nettles still surrounded the great stones, and the blotches of lichen still stretched across the windows, whose closed shutters on their rusty hinges were slowly mouldering themselves away. Her thoughts, at first of no precise character, flitted hither and thither like the greyhound which ran round in circles, barked at the butterflies, hunted the field-mice, or nibbled the corn-flowers at the edge of the wheat. • Little by little her ideas grew more definite ; and, as she sat on the grass

and dug her parasol here and there into the turf, she kept repeating to herself, "Why did I marry him?" She asked herself whether she might not by some other chance have fallen in with some other husband, and she tried to imagine what these events which had not happened, this life which had never existed, this husband whom she did not know, would have been like. All men surely were not like Charles. He might have been handsome, witty, gentlemanly, attractive, like the husbands whom her old schoolfellows no doubt had married. What were they doing now? In Paris, amid the bustle of the streets, the excitement of the theatres, the brilliance of the balls, they were living lives where the heart had room to expand and the senses to develop. But as for her, her life was as cold as a garret that looks to the north, and ennui like a spider spun its web in the shadow of the corners of her heart. She thought of the prize days at the convent, when she had to go up to the platform to take her crown. With her, long hair, her white dress, and her kid shoes, she must have looked pretty doubtless, for the gentlemen as she passed to her place leant over to pay her compliments. The courtyard was full of carriages, good-byes were sounding from the windows, and the music-master bowed as he passed with his violin case under his arm. How far off it all seemed!

One might multiply passages of this sort almost indefinitely, but one more extract must suffice. For my own part I do not know where to find a greater masterpiece of ironical contrast than the following pair of pictures. The wife, in the heyday of her passion for Rodolphe, has recovered all, and more than all, her spirit and good looks; she already dreams of an elopement and of the stock scenery and joys of her novels and her books of beauty. The husband dreams too—of a happy

future, when his daughter shall have her mother's charms—

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When in the middle of the night he returned from a visit to his patients, he did not dare to wake her. The shade of the night-light threw a circular flicker on the ceiling, and the closed curtains of the little cradle looked like a white tent in the shadow by the side of the bed. Charles gazed at both, and listened to the light breathing of the child. She would soon grow big; every change of the seasons would bring a change on her. He saw her in fancy coming home from school at evening, smiling, with her sleeves stained with ink and her basket on her arm. She would have to go to boarding-school, and that would be expensive. How should they manage? Then he began to plan. He would take a little farm in the neighbourhood, and manage it himself, visiting it on the way to visit his patients. He would save the proceeds and lay them up in the savings-bank. Then he would invest the sum, no matter how. Besides, his practice would increase. It must, for he had made up his mind that Bertha should be well brought up, that she should be clever, that she should play on the piano. How pretty she would be in fifteen or sixteen years, when she would wear straw bonnets like her mother's in summer, and they would be taken for a pair of sisters! He fancied her working in the evening by their side under the lamplight, embroidering slippers, managing the house, and filling it with her gracious ways and her cheerfulness. Then they would take care to settle her well; they would find some honest fellow with a good livelihood; they would make her happy for ever.

Madame Bovary's dreams are somewhat different:—

Behind four horses at full speed she had been travelling for a week to some new country, never to return. From the mountain brow they saw some splendid city with domes,

ships, bridges, forests of orange trees, and cathedrals of white marble, with storks' nests in their slender pinnacles. Bells sounded, mules whinnied, GUSTAVE the guitars played, and the fountains plashed, FLAUBERT. while their spray as it floated cooled piles of fruit heaped pyramid-wise at the foot of smiling statues. Then one day they came to a fishing-village, whose brown nets were drying on the shore beside the huts. There they would stay and live in a low house with flat roofs, shaded by a palm tree, at the bottom of a gulf on the edge of the sea. They would sail in gondolas, swing in hammocks: their life should be as soft and as easy as their silken garments, as passionate and starry as the nights at which they would gaze.

The contrast between these aspirations is only less striking than the contrast of the actual to-morrows which light both these fools on their way to dusty death. For the domestic happiness which Bovary forecasts, come shame, ruin, and misery; for the dissolving-view and opera-scenery delights which Emma promises herself, come cheap debauchery, insult, persecution, cowardly desertion, hideous suffering. There is no fault in the composition of the picture; every line tells, every line would be missed if it were away. Perhaps there is some unnecessary exaggeration in the loathsomeness, if not in the horror, of the deathbed. Lamartine, who was a sentimental person, is said to have objected to this deathbed because it seemed to him that, heavy as were Emma's crimes, her punishment was heavier still. I do not agree with this, and I do not miss or question the powerful relief which the details give when

one remembers the sybaritic tastes and the horror of the disagreeable which characterised the victim. But I am not sure—falling in to this extent with the tract theory—that M. Flaubert was not reprehensibly influenced in this particular by a desire to point a moral; and if this be the case it is certainly a painful instance of a lapse into the heresy of instruction on the part of a faithful servant of art. .

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Few greater contrasts can be found in fiction than the subject of Flaubert's first book and the subject of his second. Five years after *Madame Bovary* appeared *Salammbô*. From the dullest and flattest modernness the author had shifted to remote antiquity—to the nation of which less is known than of any other civilised nation, and which has to us the strangest and most unfamiliar characteristics and history. *Salammbô* is a Carthaginian story, the history of Hannibal's sister. Before writing it, Flaubert visited Carthage, and saw that of the ancient city there was nothing to be seen. He sought out with laborious erudition all the scattered fragments of historical information that yet exist respecting the city of Dido and Sophonisba, and discovered that there was little to be learnt. All his scanty information he has woven into the narrative, supplementing it with the results of his vivid imagination and his endless patience. The merits of the book were violently contested, and on the whole its

reception was scarcely favourable. I have already indicated what seems to me to have been one at least of the causes of ^{GUSTAVE} ^{FLAUBERT.} dissatisfaction. It had been impressed on the public that M. Flaubert was improper, and the expected impropriety was not sufficiently discoverable. From this came disappointment, which, if not respectable, was, perhaps, according to the ways of this world, only to be expected. Furthermore, there can be little doubt that the barbaric scenery and the shadowy characters were not relished. It was said by an acrid critic that Salammbô might or might not be Carthaginian, but that she was not human; and though the retort, that if it had been otherwise the critic would have said that she might be human but was not Carthaginian, was witty, it was hardly valid. Lastly, it must be admitted that the indulgence in repulsive detail, which is one of the author's undoubted faults, is here rather painfully marked. The book is full of blood and torture, and, perhaps, this is justifiable enough by what we know of Carthage and Carthaginian institutions. But the way in which the leprosy of the suffete Hanno pursues us through it, is surely gratuitous.

The story opens at the close of the first Punic war. The mercenaries have already begun to clamour for "their pay, and the senate, half to appease them, half to spite the absent Hamilcar Barca, have appointed his gardens as the scene

of a great banquet to the army. Wine leads to riot, and the gardens are ravaged by the drunken throng, who, however, refrain from injuring the house or insulting Salammbô. The soldiers are cajoled into leaving Carthage, but faith is not kept with them, and they at last break out into open mutiny under their historical leaders Spendius and Matho—the latter a Libyan, who has conceived a mad passion for the heroine. The mercenaries besiege Carthage, and it occurs to Spendius, a freethinking half-caste of Magna Græcia, to attempt to carry off the mantle of the goddess Tanit, the sacred Zaimph, the talisman of Carthage. He and Matho penetrate into the city by an aqueduct and achieve their object—the narrative of the capture of the Zaimph being a miracle of description. But Matho cannot bring himself to leave the city without trying the effect of his prize on Salammbô, who is known to be a frantic devotee of the goddess, and he nearly falls into the hands of his enemies in consequence. Then the mercenaries retire to Utica, and the suffete Hanno is sent to chastise them. He is at first successful, but is finally defeated with horrible carnage, and just at this crisis Hamilcar comes home. After a violent debate in the senate full powers are given him, but the forces at his disposal are too small, and he can effect hardly anything against the mercenaries. Salammbô is therefore stirred up by her father confessor (to

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give old things new names) to attempt the recovery of the Zaimph. This, after a mysterious incantation scene with a GUSTAVE FLAUBERT. tame python, she endeavours to do, and she succeeds by her blandishments in carrying it off from Matho's tent. But the effect is not miraculous. The mercenaries still prosper, and the popular fanaticism shifts from the milder goddess Tanit to the terrible Moloch. One of the *auto-da-fés* common at Carthage is resolved on, and Hannibal himself only escapes the fire by his father's artifice. The citizens gather courage, the Numidian prince, Narr' Havas, who has hitherto supported the mutineers, deserts them for love of Salammbô, and Carthage at last triumphs, her rebellious soldiery perishing almost to a man by a horrible mixture of force and treachery. Matho alone is reserved for the sport of the capital, and dies at Salammbô's feet after running the gauntlet of hideous torture through the streets. Almost instantly she herself dies, as she pledges the genius of Carthage, "for that she had touched the mantle of Tanit."

I do not know a more difficult book to judge than *Salammbô*. At the first reading—at least this was my own experience when about the time of its publication I first read it—its absence of human interest, its profusion of hideous details, its barbaric and unreal world, where the figures seem half shadows, and the scenery and properties leave a confused impression of gold and blood, of

gorgeousness and horror, on the mind, it is difficult

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But at every successive reading this disappears. The enormous genius which can thus reconstruct—or invent, if you will—a world so different from the world we know, yet coherent, consistent, possible even, and tallying well with the few known facts of the matter, the absolutely unsurpassed excellence of the descriptions, which have the matter-of-fact exactitude that Macaulay was pleased to laugh at in Dante, the power and art of the thing, in short, grow on one strangely. To read *Salammbô* has an effect something like the described effect of haschish or opium without the unpleasant after-results; and it may be added that each successive exhibition of the drug is more potent and less deleterious than the earlier experiences, a characteristic not common in artificial paradises. We grow accustomed to the grisly gorgeous world in which we find ourselves, the painting of God's judgments in purple and crimson becomes as natural as it was in a certain Hollow City, and the cruelty and the vigour, the hideous diseases and the terrible worship of the Semite, cease to affect us other than dramatically. If *Salammbô* is colourless, we remember that Jephtha's daughter owes most of her colour to the "Dream of Fair Women." If Hamilcar is treacherous and cruel, it occurs to us that some casuistry has been expended on the performances

of Jacob and David. If Hannø is a leper, what was Naaman? But for all this I do not know that *Salammbô* is to be GUSTAVE FLAUBERT. recommended for general reading. It is altogether an esoteric book requiring initiation, training, preliminary ceremonies and efforts. Now the novel-reader, not unjustly, is little inclined to comply with such a demand. He prefers that his books should please him at the first reading, not at the second, third, or tenth.

Another long interval—seven years—passed, and Flaubert once more presented himself. This time his burden was again of an entirely different nature. *Salammbô* is hardly more different from *Madame Bovary* than *L'Éducation Sentimentale* is from both. There are here no horrors, no splendours, no unfamiliar scenery, no hazardous description. I have already suggested an alternative title for the book, and of such alternatives very moderate ingenuity might supply half a dozen. It is an encyclopædic sort of novel, and goes some way towards being a whole *Comédie Humaine* of failure in two volumes. But Flaubert's critics were equal to the occasion. M. de Pontmartin had informed him that *Salammbô* might be Carthaginian, but was not human. M. St. René Taillandier now informed him that Frederic Moreau might be human, but was unreadably dull. Dulness, indeed, is a favourite charge against *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, and one criticism I have read of it pronounces it

full of all sorts of admirable things, but "dead,"
"sawdust and ashes." Let us see what

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We are introduced to the hero on board a Seine steamboat which is taking him home at the end of his college days, — college, be it remembered, in the French and Scotch, not the English sense. He meets on board the boat an affable gentleman, one M. Jacques Arnoux, with whose wife Frederic Moreau instantly falls in love, as in 1840 a young gentleman of eighteen years old was bound to do, considering that the lady had black hair and an olive skin, and was therefore strictly *comme il faut* in the romantic sense. Before he leaves the boat, the affable Arnoux invites him to go and see them in Paris, whither he is soon to return to study law, and he reaches his mother's house convinced of a great passion. As soon as he returns to the capital he makes his call, uselessly at first, but afterwards with better success. Arnoux is the editor of an art journal, and his office is the regular lounging place of a large floating circle of artists, men of letters, amateur politicians, and the like, with most of whom Frederic soon makes acquaintance. He is also, after some little time, made free of the drawing-room as well as the office, and finds Madame Arnoux as charming as he had thought her, but altogether free from coquetry, indeed a model wife and mother, while he himself is much

too young and too diffident to lay violent siege to her. His acquaintance, moreover, is not confined to this clique. He ^{GUSTAVE FLAUBERT.} makes friends up to a certain point with many of his fellow-students. He has introductions to a M. Dambreuse, a provincial *seigneur* who has amalgamated his *de* and taken to financing. After a time, too, his school crony, Deslauriers, comes up to Paris and keeps house with him. But he does not take much to the study of the law, and he does not find that his friends and the amusements of Paris give him much pleasure. He discovers, while at home on a visit, that he is much poorer than he thought, and this makes a very disagreeable change in his ideas, the only consolation he has being the small auburn-haired daughter of a rich country neighbour, to whom he reads much romantic literature, and who is immensely fond of him. Suddenly an old uncle dies and leaves him twelve hundred a year. He of course returns to Paris, expecting to lead a perfectly happy life. He renews his old friendships and makes new ones, some of them not of the most edifying description, for Arnoux introduces him to a certain Mademoiselle Rosanette, with whom Frederic in his lazy irresolute manner proceeds also to fall in love, though he never ceases to regard Madame Arnoux with the old timid adoration. Thenceforward the book is a chronicle of the history of all these persons, and of many others whom we

have not mentioned. The central figure is still Frederic and his irresolute philanderings with Madame Arnoux, Rosanette, the auburn Louise Roque, and Madame Dambreuse, who at last admits him as *amant en titre*, and after her husband's death wishes to marry him. He is always going to do something, but never does it, and his usual mental attitude, is typically represented in a scene where he is on the point of indulging his tender emotions, but reflects that "somebody may come," and so doesn't. There is not a character of the score, which figure in the book that is not in itself a masterpiece. The feminine but somewhat colourless virtues of Madame Arnoux, the amiable vulgarity and matter-of-fact caprice of Rosanette, the calculating coldness of Madame Dambreuse, the feather-headed oddities of Arnoux, who really loves his wife while he is ruining himself on her rival, and who loves art too much to make profit, and profit too much to be an artist, the slangy romanticism of the journalist Hussonet, the crazes of the dauber Pellerin, the amateur politician Regimbart, the honest clerk Dussardier, the fatuous aristocrat De Cisy, the model man Martinon, who "always presents himself in three-quarter profile, and looks as neat as a piece of Sèvres china," the vulgar lawyer Deslauriers—are all admirable. But most admirable of all is Frederic himself, good-hearted, not destitute of talent and culture,

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but unstable as water, given to 'look at all sides of a question, and so to take none, and subjected to all sorts of humiliations and disappointments at the hands of men less gifted in every way than himself. Nor is the scenery worthy of less praise. The interiors throughout are perfect. The descriptions of a visit to the Alhambra—in the Champs Elysées, not in Granada—of the fancy ball in Rosanette's apartments, and, above all, of the revolution of 1848, of which Frederic is in his external way a spectator, yield to few things of the kind. But the greatest attraction of the book is the profusion of observation and knowledge of the intricacies of action and conduct which it displays, and which I do not hesitate to say is not excelled in the work of any contemporary writer.

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To what, then, are we to attribute the comparative unpopularity of the book, which in some ten years passed through but four editions, while work far inferior could count reappearances by fifties? I can only recur to my original explanation—the explanation suggested by the author himself—that of an unpleasant nervous impression. The reader of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* does actually journey from Dan to Beersheba, and finds that all is barren. The book comes to no particular end, but years and years after its active story ceases Frederic meets first his early love, Madame Arnoux, and then his early friend,

Deslauriers. Madame Arnoux comes nominally to restore him a sum of money which
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FLAUBERT. but really to make a tacit confession of that regret respecting which Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and a good many other people have wondered whether it is not worse than remorse. Deslauriers and Moreau as they review their lives decide that the mere school-boy follies of their early youth are perhaps the happiest times they have known, and so the curtain falls on a "set gray life and apathetic end." Now the novel-reader does not like this. He probably knows in his secret heart that this setness and apathy are the actual end of an enormous number of lives. But he is not accustomed to have the fact thus sharply brought before him. The accepted laws of novel-writing require a *dénouement*, tragic it may be, arbitrary and insufficient it may be, even to the extent of the traditional marriage bells, but still a *dénouement* of some sort. The passionless review of folly and weakness which *L'Éducation Sentimentale* contains is too cold-blooded for most people to accept. They would rather have downright satire, even of the red-hot brand of Swift, than this cool depicting of failure and impotence. To a certain extent no doubt this is a question of taste and not arguable; to a certain extent, also, it is one proper to be argued, but not to be argued here. I should only say that to me it appears that

Flaubert's process is a perfectly allowable one, and that the result certainly gives me pleasure. If the last remark should appear egotistical, I can only say in excuse that I know no other test of the pleasure-giving properties of a novel, or for that matter of anything else, than its effects on oneself.

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Five years again passed, and then appeared *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, a republication in part, and scarcely in strictness to be called a novel, but far too remarkable to be passed over here. It is in semi-dramatic form, the descriptions and scenery being given in the form of stage direction. For his details Flaubert has ransacked all the pictures of Breughel, Teniers, Callot, De Bles, and a score of others, not to mention written fancies, and has added thereto, as usual, very much of his own. The book opens thus :—

The scene is in the Thebaid on the heights of a mountain, where a platform of semicircular shape is surrounded with great stones. The hermit's cell occupies the background. It is built of mud and reeds, is flat-roofed and doorless. Inside are seen a pitcher and some black bread ; in the centre on a wooden stand a large book ; on the ground, here and there, split rushes, a mat or two, a basket, and a knife. Half a dozen paces from the cell there is a tall cross planted in the ground, and at the other end of the platform a gnarled old palm-tree leans over the abyss, for the side of the mountain is scarped. At the bottom of the cliff the Nile spreads like a lake. To right and left the view is bounded by the rocks, but on the side of the desert immense undulations of a yellowish ash colour rise, one above and beyond the other, like the lines of a beach, and far off beyond the sands the mountains of the Libyan range

form a chalklike wall, shaded with violet haze. In front the sun is setting. To the north the sky is of a gray colour. But towards the zenith purple clouds like flakes of hair stretch over the blue vault. These flakes grow browner, the gray paleness spreads over the bluer patches, the bushes, the pebbles, the earth become of a hard bronze tint, and through space there floats a fine gold-coloured powder, hardly distinguishable from the vibrations of the light.

The saint begins to meditate over his past life. As he recounts it a feeling of bitterness comes over him. His lot as anchorite is so hard and then so useless. Would he not have done better to have used his talents in some worldly employment, and to have lived virtuously but in moderate comfort? While he muses thus and grows more and more discontented with his fate, strange things begin to happen. Shadows flit about; voices are heard. At last, when, hungry and thirsty, he finds that his water-jug is empty and that the jackals have stolen his last crust, the temptation becomes definite. A mighty table with all sorts of viands arises before him. But he resists this, and all is once more dark. His foot strikes a cup; it contains money—first small silver pieces, then gold. His thoughts go on gradually. With the first piece of money he can buy a sheepskin—even an anchorite may have a sheepskin. Then the ideas of avarice grow for a moment; he has almost succumbed, and, thinking with a shudder how near he has been to mortal sin, he is on the point of despair. Suddenly a vision seizes him;

he is transported to the capital, is made the emperor's first favourite—his minister—emperor himself even; then from GUSTAVE
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nosophist, Apollonius of Tyana ; and the last especially almost converts him with his pompous theosophy. Then Hilarion reappears, and causes all the gods of old, from formless idols to the inhabitants of Olympus, to file before Antony. He recounts the chief points of the respective cults, and while he makes them all ridiculous, he puts them in such a fashion as always to recall something similar in the Christian faith or practice. The procession is closed by Jehovah Himself, who laments the overthrow of His service at Jerusalem. At last Hilarion declares himself. He is the devil, ready to show himself, if Antony will, in his proper form. The saint, struck with curiosity, consents, and the devil, obtaining by this consent some power over him, carries him off as on a cloud into space. There he reveals to him the truths of natural philosophy. The sun does not set, there is no firmament, all things are infinite, and the saint receives from the devil explanations more and more Pantheistic, which lead up subtly to the last suggestion, "Suppose there should be no God?" But Antony has just resolution enough to refuse the fatal answer, and the fiend disappears. The temptation, however, is not over. Two women, one old and withered, one young and fair, dispute him. One is Death, the other Vice. Death offers him rest, Vice offers him pleasure. They wrangle over him, each striving to show that the joys which the other can offer are paralleled

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by her own ; and at last they wrestle with one another, and disappear, strangely blended in one monstrous figure. Saint Anthony has still his philosophical ideas in his head, and he begins to reason somewhat arrogantly on what he has seen. Then the Sphinx and the Chimera present themselves, and these two emblems of philosophical speculation argue like mediæval disputants. They are followed by a procession of the "fauna of fancy"—the pigmies and all the fantastic tribes that Herodotus tells of—the basilisk, the unicorn, and their fellows. All mysteries of the living world pass before Antony, down to the creatures of the microscope, until once more the Pantheist ideal comes back on him, and he nearly blasphemes. Then the day dawns, the sun rises, and in the middle of the sun glows forth the face of Christ. The saint crosses himself and falls on his knees.

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This *Temptation* is my own favourite among its author's books. It is the best example of dream-literature that I know, and the capacities of dreams and hallucinations for literary treatment are undoubted. But most writers, including even De Quincey, who have tried this style, have erred, inasmuch as they have endeavoured to throw a portion of the mystery with which the waking mind invests dreams over the dream itself. Any one's experience is sufficient to show that this is wrong. The events of dreams as they happen are quite plain and matter-of-fact, and it is only in

the intervals, and, so to speak, the scene-shifting of dreaming, that any suspicion of strangeness occurs to the dreamer.

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This truth is fully kept in view in *La Tentation*, and I do not know any other book in which it is so kept. One views all Antony's experiences exactly as Antony himself would have viewed them. The occasional mis-giving of the supernatural is there; but the actually supernatural occurrences are related with strict simplicity and verisimilitude.

In 1877 Flaubert published, under the title of *Trois Contes*, a volume which has the curious merit of giving in little examples, and very perfect examples, of all the styles which have made him famous. *Un Cœur Simple* displays exactly the same qualities of minute and exact observation, the same unlimited fidelity of draughtsmanship, which distinguish *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation Sentimentale*. *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier* shows the same power over the mystical and the vague which is shown in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. *Hérodiade* has the gorgeousness, the barbaric colours, and the horror of *Salammbô*. Of the three I have no hesitation in preferring *La Légende de Saint Julien*. The history of the Norman *bonne* Félicité, her fidelity, her narrow brain, her large heart, the way in which employers, relations, and all connected with her make use of her and owe her no thanks, is a wonderful *tour de force*, but it has the defects of

its quality. One feels that the author is in effect saying, "I am going to make you, whether you will or no, take an interest in this commonplace picture of humble life;" and though he is successful, there is a certain sense of effort and of disproportion. *Hérodias*, again, has much the same defects as its prototype. The sketch of Aulus Vitellius is faithfully loathsome, and the scenery of the sketch is as a piece of scene-painting unsurpassable. The breath of the Dead Sea and the desert, the atmosphere of Jewish, Idumæan, and Arab savagery, is all over it; but the "nervous impression" still stands in the way. In *Saint Julien*, this is no longer the case, and the effect is admirable.

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The legend begins, in true legend-fashion, at the very birth of the saint. He is the son of a wealthy baron and a noble dame who live at peace and in plenty. At his birth marvels are presaged of him by strange visitants, and he is brought up in all the exercises of chivalry. He early develops, however, a certain propensity to bloodshed. He kills the mice in the chapel, the pigeons in the garden, and soon his advancing years give him the opportunity of indulging this taste in hunting. He spends whole days in the chase, caring less for the sport than for the slaughter. One winter day he starts early, and game is more than usually plentiful. He slays insanely without attempting to retrieve his victims, and at last massacres a

whole herd of deer, finding them enclosed in a glen which has no outlet. Then—

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FLAUBERT. Across the valley, at the edge of the forest, he perceived a stag, a hind and her fawn. The stag was black and of huge size. His antlers had sixteen points, and his beard was white. The hind, of the pale colour of dead leaves, was browsing, and gave suck to the dappled fawn without interrupting her steps. The whiz of the crossbow once more sounded and the fawn fell dead. Thereat his mother looking up to heaven belled with a deep voice, agonising and human, and Julian, irritated thereby, stretched her on the ground with a second shot. Then the great stag saw him and made a bound towards him. Julian despatched his last arrow, which hit him full in the forehead and stuck there. But the stag seemed not to feel it. He strode over the bodies, he came nearer and nearer, he was on the point of ripping him up, and Julian shrank back in terror unutterable. But the mighty beast stopped suddenly, and with flaming eyes and a solemn tone, as of a hoary judge, he said three times, while a bell tolled in the distance, "Accursed one! ruthless of heart! thou shalt slay thy father and thy mother." Then his knees tottered, and, closing his eyes, he expired.

Julian returns to the castle horrified at this prediction, and almost immediately accidents happen which seem on the point of fulfilling it. In alarm he quits his home and becomes a wandering soldier. His success in war is equal to his good luck in the chase, and at last he saves the Emperor of Occitania from the Moslem, marries his daughter, and lives in peace and splendour. But nothing will induce him to hunt, for he fancies that on his abstinence depends the

fulfilment of the prediction. His wife tries to combat this idea, and one evening he sets out. For a long time no game at all appears, and when he meets a beast he is either unready for it or he misses it. By degrees his ill-luck becomes mysterious. His lance splinters on the quarry, his arrows stop in mid-course. At length—

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All the birds and beasts that he had been pursuing suddenly reappeared and closed round him in a narrow circle. Some were in a sitting posture, others stood upright; he himself remained in the midst, frozen with terror and incapable of movement. With a final effort of will he made a step forward, and then the birds on the branches spread their wings, the beasts on the ground stirred their limbs, all accompanied him. Before him marched the hyenas, and behind him the wolf and the boar. The wild bull on his right swung his head from side to side, and at his left the serpent writhed through the grass, while the panther, arching her back, walked with dainty steps and long strides. He went as slowly as possible for fear of irritating them, and from the thickets there issued in crowds porcupines, foxes, jackals, and bears. He began to run: they ran too. The serpent hissed, the slaver of the foul creatures dropped. The wild boar rubbed his heels with his tusks, the wolf thrust his shaggy head into the hollow of Julian's hand. The monkeys pinched him and grinned, the polecat glided over his feet. With a blow of his paw a bear knocked off his hat, and the panther, as if in scorn of him, tossed away an arrow which she carried in her mouth. In all their gestures there was an air of irony; they watched him out of the corners of their eyes, and seemed plotting vengeance, till, deafened by the buzzing of the insects, blinded by the flapping of the wings, choked by the noisome breath of the beasts, he walked with outstretched hands, and eyes shut like one deprived of sight, and had not even strength to cry for mercy.

No actual injury comes to him from this ghostly procession. Its effect, however, is not to warn, but to provoke him. He is furious at his impotence to harm; and when he is at the edge of the forest, though his hideous escort leaves him as the cock crows, fresh delusions of a minor kind beset him. He makes his way to the castle in a mood of baffled rage, ready to break out on any object. During his absence his parents, who have wandered all over the earth to find him, have come to his castle. His wife has received them joyfully, and made them rest in her own couch. Julian returns late and silently, sees a beard on the pillow, and, mad with jealousy, slays at a single blow, as he thinks, his wife and her paramour. He is not long in perceiving his mistake, and the horrible crime he has in consequence committed. His resolution is soon taken. He leaves his wife and his riches, and once more becomes a wanderer, but this time a wanderer of a different kind. He turns mendicant friar, giving himself up utterly to penance and good works of all sorts, and finally he establishes himself on the borders of a dangerous river, and ferries over passengers at the hazard of his life and for no reward. At last, one stormy night he is summoned to the other side, and there finds a leper in the most loathsome stage of the disease. With superhuman effort he crosses the stream, but his trial does not, as in the kindred instance of

St. Christopher, cease there. The leper demands shelter and hospitality, and Julian gives him both, yielding up his whole scanty supply of food and drink,—an act which results, according to the horrible Jewish theory, in the communication of the wretch's disease to the inanimate objects he touches. Then he demands Julian's bed, and it is given him. But he is dying of cold, and Julian must lie down by him, clasp him in his arms, revive him with his own vital heat. It is done.

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Then the leper embraced him closely and suddenly; his eyes had the brightness of stars, his hair grew long and shaped like the rays of the sun, the breath of his nostrils was as the sweetness of roses, from the hearth a cloud of incense arose, and the billows of the river sang in harmony. Into the soul of Julian there came an abundance of delight—a joy more than human, and like a mighty wave. But he who held him closer and closer grew and grew till the walls of the hovel on both sides were reached by his head and his feet. Then the roof parted, and the firmament was seen, and Julian went up the blue spaces of the heaven, face to face with Christ the Lord.

No discussion of Flaubert's merits would be complete without some notice of the Realism of which he was the chief master. I do not know that this unlucky term has been included in the list of those fallen words whose history has been often bewailed, but the idle mind may contemplate with some interest the realism of William of Champeaux side by side with the realism of M. Zola. In the latter sense it is, as the Marquis de Custine called it, a *grossière étiquette* enough, and

even, as it seems to me, one of which it is somewhat difficult to understand the precise meaning. As a term of abuse it is as intelligible as most terms of abuse; that is to say, it means that the speaker does not like the thing spoken of. But as a classifying epithet having any literary or scientific value it appears to me to be of but small account. I suppose, if it means anything, it means the faithful patience and the sense of artistic capacity which lead a man to grapple boldly with his subject, whatever that subject may be, and to refuse *tanquam scopulum* easy generalities and accepted phrase. This procedure is naturally more striking when the subject matter is of an unpleasant character, and hence the superficial critic runs away with the idea that realism means the choice of unpleasant subjects. From this to the deliberate choosing of unpleasant subjects, in order to qualify for the title of realist, there is only a step. Now, in this sense, I venture to say that there is no reason whatever for affixing the "etiquette" to Flaubert. His subjects are doubtless often unpleasant enough, but I cannot see that there is the faintest evidence of their having been chosen for their unpleasantness. It is, perhaps, a question whether unpleasantness would not predominate in the absolutely faithful record of any life. It has been said that no man would dare to write such a record of his own history; and all that can be said of Flaubert is that he

has dared to do, for certain classes and types, what they dare not do for themselves.

The ordinary novel is a compromise ^{GUSTAVE} and a convention. ^{FLAUBERT.} Of compromises and conventions Flaubert knows nothing. He dares in especial to show failure, and I think it will be found that this is what few novelists dare, unless the failure be of a tragic and striking sort. He draws the hopeful undertakings that come to nothing, the dreams that never in the least become deeds, the good intentions that find their usual end, the evil intentions which also are balked and defeated, the parties of pleasure that end in pain or weariness, the enterprises of pith and moment that somehow fall through. Perhaps this is realism, and, if it be, it seems to me that realism is a very good thing. It is pleasant doubtless to read about Sindbad as he comes home in triumph regularly after every voyage with his thousands or his millions of sequins. But the majority of Sindbads have experiences of a somewhat different sort, and I do not see why the majority also should not have their bard.

The antagonism, however, which has grown up as a matter of association between real and ideal makes the use of this word realism in this sense distinctly objectionable, for it leads the reader to suppose that a realist must necessarily be unideal. How far this supposition, taken in a prejudicial sense, may lead even grave and

sober judges astray, may be seen in some criticisms on our author. One French critic, to
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Enough must have been said to bear out the contention I have already made that the importance of Flaubert is very much greater as a maker of literature than as a maker of novels, though I am far from inferring that in the latter capacity he must not be allowed very high rank. His observation of the types of human nature which he selects for study is astonishingly close and complete; his attention to unity of character never sleeps, and he has to a very remarkable degree the art of chaining the attention even when the subject is a distasteful one to the reader. He has been denied imagination, but I cannot suppose that the denial was the result of a full perusal of his work. The reader of *Madame Bovary* only might possibly be excused for making such a charge, the reader of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* only would be almost certain to make it. But *Salammbô* supplies an almost

and his accuracy in describing his own impressions and imaginations may be assumed to be equally minute. We cannot imagine Flaubert suppressing an idea because it was troublesome to express or unpleasant to handle, or in any other way intractable. He is altogether of the opinion of Gautier in his contempt for the writer whose thoughts find him unequal to the task of giving them expression, and he may be assumed to be of Gautier's opinion also respecting the excellence of dictionaries as reading, for his vocabulary is simply unlimited.

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Now all these characteristics are distinctly those of the abstract *littérateur* rather than those of the novelist. There is probably no other literary form in which they could have been so well displayed as in the novel, certainly there is none in which they would have been so satisfactorily enjoyed. One takes up Flaubert and reads a chapter, or two or three, with hardly any reference to the already familiar story. His separate tableaux are, as I have said, admirably and irreproachably combined. But their individual merit is so great that they possess interest independently of the combination. He is a writer upon whom one can try experiments with one's different moods, very much as one can try experiments with different lights upon a picture. The immense labour which he has evidently spent upon his work has resulted in equally immense

excellence. His cabinets have secret drawers in them which are only discoverable after long familiarity. It has been justly said of him that he can do with a couple of epithets what Balzac takes a page of laborious analysis to do less perfectly. All this is so rarely characteristic of a novelist, that it has, perhaps, seemed to some people incompatible with the novelist's qualities—a paralogism excusable enough in the mere subscriber to the circulating library, but certainly not excusable in the critic. Flaubert was a novelist, and a great one. As a dramatist or a poet he might, had his genius so inclined him, have been greater still in the general estimation; but he could hardly have been greater in the estimation of those who are content to welcome greatness in the form in which it chooses to present itself, instead of suggesting that it should suit its costume to their preconceived ideas.

Since Flaubert's death in 1881 a very unusual amount, not of new matter whereon to found criticism, but of documents important for correcting and checking criticism already made, has been published respecting him. In the first place there appeared the posthumous work (on which a few remarks have been inserted above), *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. This is Flaubert's only failure. In design it is something like a particularisation with immense developments of the plan of *Gulliver's Travels*: indeed, Flaubert might be accused

of having, in it, justified to some extent M. Taillandier's preposterous criticism given above. Two Parisian *employés* GUSTAVE FLAUBERT. who possess between them a moderate fortune, go into the country to enjoy themselves for the remainder of their days, and are most dismally disappointed. They try history only to find it all apples of Sodom, literature only to be bored and disenchanted, science only to potter and fail, benevolence only for their protégés to turn out worthless, even vice to a certain extent only to find that it is very bitter in the belly and not very sweet in the mouth. In the *scenario* of the unfinished part it is written, "Ainsi tout leur a craqué dans la main." Now this, though a very ambitious, is not an impossible scheme. The Preacher did it and more than it in a dozen pages long ago: Mr. Thackeray has done not much less in a dozen volumes. Whether in the heyday of his strength Flaubert could have done it is a might-have-been argument of no great importance. As a fact he did not.

Meanwhile general interest (which at the date of the bulk of this essay was not strong) in Flaubert had been growing, and his younger friends the Naturalists had been distorting his method, or something as near it as they could reach, in a very surprising manner. Even earlier gossip had talked of a certain club of four—Flaubert, M. Zola, M. Daudet, and the Russian novelist Tourguéneff—

who met and talked enormities from time to time. Not very long after Flaubert's death appeared the reminiscences of his much earlier friend, M. Maxime du Camp, which contained a good deal about the author of *Madame Bovary*, and developed a complete theory about his peculiarities, to the effect that a serious illness which he had had in early manhood had in some curious fashion arrested his creative power—all his ideas having been formed previously—but had left him the merely literary faculty in full strength. This excited no little wrath among Flaubert's later friends, and besides indulging in various polemical writings, they began a series of publications of his letters (and of a few unimportant early works) which has lasted to the present time. By these letters (the earliest instalment of which was an especially interesting correspondence with George Sand) and by other documents, two facts of great interest and importance were made clear. The first was that Flaubert's admirable style (which had struck all fit, however few, readers before) was the result of a perfectly Herculean study of the *mot propre*; the second, which had been also anticipated by critics, that Flaubert occupied a very singular middle position between Romanticism and Naturalism, between the theory of literary art which places the idealising of merely observed facts first of all, and is sometimes not too careful about the observation, and the

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theory which places the observation first if not also last, and is sometimes ostentatiously careless of any idealising whatsoever. The publication of these personal details excited, as is the way of the world, a much wider though perhaps not a more intelligent interest in Flaubert than had previously existed, and discussions on him in current literature have been proportionately more active. But I do not know that there is much to add to the criticism given above. In style of the less spontaneous and more studied kind Flaubert has few if any superiors; in satirical contemplation of what is not the joy of living he has even fewer, perhaps none; in maintaining, in spite of his own realist rummaging of the "document," the absolute prerogative, and what is more, the absolute duty of art to idealise and transcend, he stands alone among writers of recent days. With a happier temperament and *milieu* he might (it is not certain that he would) have done things even better; with what he had he did great things. And especially he was a living and writing witness, too much of their own to be refused, as to the fatal error of the degenerate Realist or Naturalist school.

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OF all the words which, by dint of clumsy repetition and misuse, have become unwelcome to the ears of Englishmen, there are perhaps few that are more unwelcome than the words Bohemia and Bohemianism. The terms have not, in their modern acceptation, had a long life, and it is even doubtful who invented them, though George Sand has, I believe, the credit of the invention. They have been worked pretty hard even in France. But in England, from causes the discussion of which might be instructive but would certainly be out of place here, they have had singularly ill fortune. The lower variety of novelist and journalist has fastened upon them, and after his kind has altogether perverted their meaning. Sometimes it seems to be assumed that anybody who has any sort of connection with literature or art is a Bohemian, and the word would thus apply to colour-grinders and printers' devils. Sometimes, and more often, the assumption is made that Bohemianism

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consists in more or less senseless and vulgar dissipation, extravagance, and display. Indeed it would appear from certain writers that the *differentia* of the Bohemian man consists in smoking cheroots while he is drinking choice claret, and that the *differentia* of the Bohemian woman consists in wearing blue satin and diamonds when ladies would content themselves with ordinary apparel. It is no wonder that this sort of ignorant folly should have disgusted people of better taste with the word. The "green uplands of sacred Bohemia" have seemed to the novelist and journalist of whom I speak, as suitable a place of deposit for the stale litter of picnics as the uplands of his own country appear to the average sightseer. To put the thing briefly, the Bohemian ideal of France is not unlike Chatterton; the Bohemian ideal of at least some Englishmen is more like an unamiable Dick Swiveller.

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The careful and affectionate historians of literary curiosities in France have distinguished three successive Bohemias. The earliest and greatest was the society which met nearly half a century ago in the crumbling buildings of the Rue du Doyenné, where painters soon to be famous throughout Europe frescoed the walls to compensate for the lack of furniture, and poets supplied the deficiency of firewood with inspiring sonnets. This first Bohème sent forth Gautier, Corot, Arsène Houssaye, who all lived to reap praise and profit from their tastes and talents; Gérard de Nerval, who divides

with Murger the honour of being the type of the higher Bohemia, Célestin Nanteuil, and others too long to tell. Of the second Bohemia, which dates from the last ten years of the July monarchy and the early days of the Empire, Murger himself, Champfleury, the ingenious author of *Les Excentriques*, and Privat d'Anglemont, a little-known man of letters who lived mysteriously and died wretchedly, were the most characteristic figures. The third and latest, which was only dispersed by the war of 1870 and in a fashion survived it, has a sadder history and a faithful historian. M. Firmin Maillard, in a remarkable series of sketches which appeared in the Parnassian journal *La Renaissance*, and which were, I believe, afterwards reprinted with additions, gave us the history of this strange hive of paradox, genius, and I fear I must add folly, which gathered in the Brasserie des Martyrs, as Murger's society had gathered in the Café Momus. M. Maillard showed us men who made a real success in art and letters occasionally visiting this palace of literary sin, but never remaining long there. Those who did remain had, with few exceptions, one and the same end, *la fosse commune*. This curious book (*Les Derniers Bohèmes*, it is called) fully illustrates, though in a negligent, sketchy, and almost phantasmagoric fashion, the warnings which Murger himself vainly addressed to his would-be followers years before. The Brasserie is the nominal haunt of the Muses, but these goddesses are not nine but

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two, the Green Muse of Absinthe and the Brown Muse of Tobacco. The talent that might have done good things if not great ones, wastes itself in paradox, in vain decrying of the accepted reputations of the day, in idle witticisms and careless fleetings of the time which might do for the golden world of Arden, but not for our latter and leaden age. The critic, who ought to be making a serious study, remarks that "Lamartine is a piano, Hugo is a great man, Dupont is a poet;" and feels that he has done his day's work in the effort. Two great but unrecognised bards are found following in the guise and attitude of mourners a van-load of empty wine casks, and on being asked for an explanation reply, "Il faut respecter ses morts." All alike forget that the garden has to be cultivated first; and before all in time yawns the pauper's grave, whither they have in turn followed their penniless comrades, and where the gravedigger, disappointed of his fee, politely remarks, "Ce sera pour la prochaine fois."

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Henry Murger and his own set, to do them justice, if they did not justify their Bohemia by turning out from the Café Momus any Corot or Gautier, did not descend to the mere tavern-haunting *fainéantise* of M. Maillard's dolorous heroes; still less to the yet more ignoble cult of the *assommoirs* on the "Boul' Mich'," by which the frequentation of the Brasserie des Martyrs has in its turn been succeeded. The worst *Bohème* is above the *vadrouilleur*. It is admitted that many,

if not the major part, of the scenes that Murger draws are historical, and we have to take account of the mistaken heroism of the "Buveurs d'Eau," as well as of the mere villonesque vagabondage of Rodolphe and Schaunard—the latter a real personage much babbled of by reporters after his death. These two classes represent Bohemians of the upper and lower type. The Buveur d'Eau is a devotee of art or letters who expressly and absolutely refuses to descend to potboiling, even of an honourable, much more of a dubious kind. Nothing will induce him to forge old masters for a picture-dealer, or to write a pamphlet which a stupid deputy is to sign as his own. He even dislikes, if he does not actually refuse, perfectly respectable hack-work, and hence in a majority of cases having, as Murger admits, no striking or exceptional talent, he dies of sheer starvation and hardship. The jovial Bohemian is of a different order. He talks about the dignity of art even more than the water-drinker, but his practical respect for it cannot be said to be excessive. He is not exactly a swindler, though he is apt to regard landlords and publicans as dwellers beyond the line, where there is always the license of war. He has no objection whatever to putting his talents to any profitable use in his pursuit of "that shyest of game, the five-franc piece"; but when he has decoyed one of these animals into his clutches, it is sure to escape again directly. Unless he falls utterly under the domination of

the two sinister muses, the Bohemian of this kind does not often come finally to the fate of Chatterton and Gilbert. He returns like the prodigal to his family ; he marries a wealthy widow ; or he adopts some sufficiently lucrative business. Sometimes even he makes himself a man of letters and of art in reality, and receives from feuilletons and portraits the daily bread which epics and allegorical designs have refused him.

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Murger himself appears to have tasted both these varieties of Bohemianism. It does not fall within my plan to recount his life at any length. It is sufficient to say that he early experienced the resentment of the father who wishes to turn his son into a maker of coats, and finds that he prefers to be a maker of verses. He obtained a kind of secretaryship to the Russian Count Tolstoy, his duties being (after the tradition probably of Grimm's Leaves) to keep the Czar acquainted with the course of French literature. The duties were light and the payment was lighter, being about a pound a week, but such as it was it made him a capitalist among his penniless fellows. He does actually appear to have edited the great periodical *Le Castor*, over which his readers have so often laughed, and which, being professedly a trade journal for hatters and bonnet-makers, dealt with the highest subjects of literature and philosophy. It only lasted a few weeks, however, and therefore the "hyperphysic" speculations of Gustave Colline must have been more limited than the *Scènes*

de la Vie de Bohème represent them. At length Murger was introduced to the *Artiste* and its editor Arsène Houssaye. M. Houssaye and Gérard de Nerval at once recognised their colleague's genius, and from that time Murger had no difficulty in getting his copy taken wherever he chose. For the last dozen years of his life, so M. Fiorentino informs us, there was no journal which was not only too glad to have him. Yet, notwithstanding this, he was always embarrassed. He was by no means a rapid writer, often giving the work of an entire night from sunset to morning to a single newspaper article or scene. He also retained the specially Bohemian habit of never working except when in the vein, and he was not always or often in that vein. Still it may be assumed that during the latter portion of his life he was never in actual distress. The hardships, however, of his youth and early manhood, together with a certain peculiarity of disposition not attributable to those hardships, definitely moulded and coloured the whole of his work, even the latest of it. He never forgot the hunger and the cold which he had suffered, nor did he forget the sight of his comrades who, less fortunate than himself, had actually succumbed to the pressure of want. There is something hideous in the indelible impression which cold in particular seems to have made on him. Throughout his work, often quite unconsciously and in no special connection with the context, we come on

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little touches which show his shuddering remembrances of long fireless days in crazy lodgings with the winter winds blowing in on the lonely student; of nights when the wretched clothing of the day is added to the bedding, and both together are not enough. But joined to this physical and accidental impression, there is a profound discouragement and disbelief in happiness which is less attributable to outward causes. The *Ballade du Désespéré*, his latest poem, seems to express no fancy troubles. Murger's sorrow is not Wertherism or *Weltschmerz*. It is not vanity or posing of any sort. It is a simple conviction of the facts that in this world bread is hard to win, and love is impossible to keep. He is to me one of the most melancholy writers in all literature, and the sadness arises from the simplicity of his demands, and the sincerity of his conviction that they can never be granted. At mere *Katzenjammer* one can generally, if one chooses, laugh. Most people, however much they may admire Werther or René or Childe Harold or the *Enfant du siècle*, or Obermann, or the great and recent M. Amiel, are perfectly well aware of the ludicrous points about these gentlemen, which are abundant enough. They are not wholly sincere to begin with, and if they were wholly sincere they would be unreasonable. But there is nothing ludicrous about Murger's sorrow. There is not the slightest affectation about it. There is none of that protest,

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expressed or implied, against the upper powers for failing to recognise the extraordinary merit of the complainant; which is the weakest point of Byronism. Murger has merely in his own person experienced, and in the general interest bewailed, the old curse of insufficient nourishment for the body, and the old woe of unstable support for the heart. He has reduced his demands to their simplest terms, and the most ingenious economist cannot cut them down further, though he may possibly hint commonplaces about the superiority of the temperament which makes no demands at all.

There is no doubt that Murger was saved from the risk of following Chateaubriand, Byron, Sénan-cour, and Musset, of preceding the Genevese professor, into the perilous borderland between the pathetic and the ridiculous, by his genuine and healthy sense of humour. He never fails to see the joke of it as well as the pity of it; and when the writer sees the joke the reader is on his side at once. The absurd and the lamentable sides of Bohemianism present themselves to him quite impartially, and he renders them with equal fidelity. We are never asked to make heroes of the unheroic. Murger knows as well as we do that the young man who prefers, in the name of art and letters, hand-to-mouth idleness to honest work is a person very little to be respected. He urges pitilessly on the inglorious Miltons that, in the majority of cases, they are only inglorious Blackmores after all. He is as sound as

Thackeray on the point of the 'eccentricities' of genius. Hence we can take his serious and his comic delineations with equal confidence and comfort, knowing that there is neither melodrama in the one nor buffoonery in the other. The fact—which I believe is a fact—that a very large number of the incidents of his tales are personal experiences does not add to their interest in my eyes, but in this respect I am probably in the minority. I prefer for my part to pay attention to the legends, good or bad, which are told of his life and his death, only in so far as they bear out the impression of his character given by his works. "Passons aux choses réelles," said Balzac, "parlons d'Eugénie Grandet," when they told him of some death or failure. In the same way, when any one talks to us about the Murger of Doctor Dubois's *maison de santé*, let us say, "Passons aux choses réelles : parlons des Buveurs d'Eau."

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As they are at present collected, Murger's works fill thirteen volumes of prose and one of verse. I cannot here dwell on his poetry. It is of no rare or exalted order; but it has great freshness, sweetness, and sincerity, and the single volume which contains it is perhaps more satisfactory to poetical students than a good many volumes of far more famous poets. Three of the pieces, completely enough representative of the rest, have been translated with admirable fidelity and grace by Mr. Lang in his *Ballads and Lyrics*

of Old France ; and I cannot do better than reproduce one of them here.

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OLD LOVES

Louise, have you forgotten yet
The corner of the flowery land,
The ancient garden where we met,
My hand that trembled in your hand ?
Our lips found words scarce sweet enough,
As low beneath the willow trees
We sat ;—Have you forgotten, love ?
Do you remember, love Louise ?

Marie, have you forgotten yet
The loving barter that we made ?
The rings we changed, the sun that set,
The woods fulfilled with sun and shade ?
The fountains that were musical
By many an ancient trysting-tree—
Marie, have you forgotten all ?
Do you remember, love Marie ?

Christine, do you remember yet
Your room with scents and roses gay ?
My garret—near the sky 'twas set—
The April hours, the nights of May ?
The clear calm night, the stars above,
That whispered they were fairest seen
Through no cloud-veil ? Remember, love !
Do you remember, love Christine ?

Louise is dead, and, well-a-day !
Marie a sadder path has ta'en ;
And pale Christine has passed away
In southern suns to bloom again.
Alas ! for one and all of us—
Marie, Louise, Christine forget ;
Our bower of love is ruinous,
And I alone remember yet.

This note of quiet sadness places Murger at a distance alike from Béranger and from Alfred de Musset, and is repeated in most of his poetical works.

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The prose works which concern us properly here consist in the main of collections of short tales. It was, indeed, in this specially French kind that Murger excelled. One is almost tempted to say that he could not write a regular novel on a large scale; certainly, he very seldom attempted it. The unfinished story of *Les Roueries de l'Ingénue*, which was found among his papers, is entirely different from all his other works, and was evidently intended for a regular romance. M. Arsène Houssaye has eloquently analysed it—as it might have been; but the analysis rather suggests the polygraphic and polypragmatic editor, manager, novelist, and critic himself, than it represents Murger. The *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* is really what it pretends to be, a series of scenes, and not a connected work. *Les Vacances de Camille* and *Le Pays Latin* are but long tales. *Adeline Protat* and the *Sabot Rouge* are, indeed, designed on the scale of full-sized novels, and the former is a most charming picture of country life, but it is little more. As *Adeline Protat* shows the agreeable side of such life, so does the *Sabot Rouge* exhibit the reverse of the medal. It is, however, at least to my taste, scantily provided with interest. The worse side of the French peasant is powerfully brought out in the hideous

crime by which Derizelles rids himself of the daughter-in-law whom he schemed to obtain, and the final scene of retribution, is, like all Murger's dealings with his enemy, winter, a masterpiece. But these are hardly sufficient to redeem the book as a whole ; though it compares advantageously with later and more famous workings-up of the same theme.

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The shorter sketches, on the other hand, are for the most part pure nectar. Who can possibly, in his dullest or sulkiest moments, take up the *Vie de Bohème* without the certainty of laughter ? Whether it is M. Mouton's ideas on journalism, or Schaunard's proposition to keep a tame lobster as a companion and helpmate, painting it red for the sake of cheerfulness, or the Père Médecis's day-book, with its extraordinary revelations, the inexhaustible gaiety is the same, and if the chapters of Mimi and Musette are not exactly gay, they have a charm which is certainly not inferior to that of the lighter portions. *Les Buveurs d'Eau*, with its revelations of the severer Bohemia we have mentioned, completes the picture appropriately from the other side, and the charming sketch *Hélène* should sufficiently rebuke those who assert that Murger could not draw a modest girl. Then there is the third series of views, not of gaiety and amusement, not of passionate devotion to art, but of simple misery and failure, such as those given in the exquisite sketches of *Le Manchon de Francine*—partly and very injudiciously included in the

Vie de Bohème—and *La Biographie d'un Inconnu*. The single volume, at the head of which stands *Madame Olympe*, contains samples of great and most varied power. *Madame Olympe* itself is not of the first class, though it is amusing enough. But how graceful a leaf from the book of artist-life is *Comment on devient Coloriste*, and what a charming fantasy is *Le Victime du Bonheur*, the history of a too serious Mark Tapley, who is with the greatest difficulty kept from suicide in his despair of finding occasions for Tapleian jollity! *La Fleur Bretonne* points once more Murger's mournful moral of woman's inconstancy; but how fresh and graceful is the treatment of the worn old subject! *Le Fauteuil Enchanté*, a little morality in a dozen pages, is of quite a different kind, yet equally perfect. In *Christine* there is tragedy, and of the truest. *Entre Quatre Murs* gives the reverse of *La Fleur Bretonne*, and, finally, *Les Premières Amours du Jeune Bluet* draws the most incomparable picture of boyish love since Rousseau and Mademoiselle de Vulson.

I have specified the contents of this volume rather because of their miscellaneous and representative character, than because they seem to me to be above the average of Murger's work. It is often not in the best or most striking of a writer's productions that his idiosyncrasy is most clearly shown, and though the *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* and the *Buveurs d'Eau* between them perhaps

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exhausted all of actually novel that Murger had to say, his remaining volumes are at least of equal interest, as showing the inexhaustible freshness of his manner of saying it. One only of these is hardly worthy of him, and this is the *Propos de Ville et Propos de Théâtre*. The contents of this volume are neither more nor less than a collection of the short funny paragraphs which used to be a regular department of all newspapers, and which still continue under the heads of *faits divers*, *nouvelles à la main*, and so forth, to figure in most Parisian journals. They are amusing in their way even now; but if we had a collection of the jokes which Lamb used to elaborate at sixpence apiece for Mr. Daniel Stuart of the *Morning Post*, it is not probable that it would have added very much to our admiration of the author of *Elia*, and this is an exactly parallel case. *Le Dernier Rendezvous*, like the *Scènes de Jeunesse*, to which it is a complement, is touching enough; and the *Resurrection de Lazare*, which is usually bound up with it, is perhaps its author's farthest excursion into the regions of broad farce, if we except *Son Excellence Gustave Colline*. Of the two, I personally prefer the latter. The delegation of the ex-tutor in the first disorders of the revolution of February as envoy to an impossible German principality is a capital idea, and it is not worked out at sufficient length to be tedious. With *Lazare* the case is different. The glorious confusion of

the plot, in which a score of characters are playing at cross purposes, is delightful, and the little touches in the character of HENRY MURGER. Blanche, the wise and provident damsel, and Louisa, the imprudent and imaginative, are masterly. But the tariff of the prison of Vincennes, where the prisoners are furnished with spiders tame or wild at their pleasure, and with plants, for carrying out the moral of *Picciola*, is too extravagantly burlesque to be quite in keeping with the central character of Lazare, a young man of excellent talents and morals who gets into the clutches of two fiendish aristocrats. The fiendish aristocrat, male and female, is one of Murger's weakest points, and it is fortunate that he does not very often attempt it. In order to give an idea of his manner I shall not make an abstract of any of his longer works, which are not well suited to that process. There is among his later sketches one which, though I do not think it received his final touches, exhibits his lighter mood admirably. This is *La Scène du Gouverneur*, which can be given nearly in full. Of his sadder and more poetical vein, it is hardly possible to find a better example than the charming fantasy piece, which, under the name of Ballade, though it is in prose, appears in his volume of posthumous poems, and which is entitled *Amours d'un Grillon et d'une Étincelle*. Here is the *Scene of the Governor*, which bears the sub-title of *Souvenirs de Jeunesse* :—

Once upon a time, I had two friends, whom I shall call Theodore and Leon. Neither was more than twenty years old, and yet—wonderful to say—they were still young, for youth had not yet gone out of fashion. My two friends, who lived together, had for joint use a collection of furniture which appeared to have been selected from the ruins produced by an earthquake. The sternest of bailiffs would have declined to meddle with it. The tables were halt, the armchairs maimed, and when you sat upon them they groaned like a wounded man whose injured limb is touched. The piano, one long array of false notes, sighed dolefully. The wooden clock struck hours entirely of its own invention. The variations of the barometer were enough to presage tempests and deluges. There was a compass which steadily pointed to the south, and not a piece of furniture in the room but rocked and quivered when a carriage passed in the street. One object, and only one, was in good order; this was a casket, a real strong box, fit to defy the forty thieves themselves, or even the ingenuity of a modern financier. It was a coffer fit to hold untold gold and wrought like a lock of Quentin Matsys, but its immediate purpose was that of a tobacco jar, and it was not always that it held any tobacco.

However there was, somehow, good work done on these rickety tables, and sound sleep enjoyed in the scanty stretcher beds, covered as they were with mattresses as thin and as hard as a ship's biscuit. The situation of the room was sufficiently near the sky, but this gave it the advantage of an admirable view. On one side and in front there was the Luxembourg, and behind the eye had a range of gardens, almost in their natural state, to wander over. During the summer the two friends spent most of their time in a large balcony protected by an awning. As they were above hiding their affairs from their neighbours, most of their visitors were received here, and they even on one occasion gave a nocturnal fête in the Venetian manner which excited much attention in the quarter, and which an officer of police was kind enough to honour with his

company. A system of communism prevailed between the friends, not merely as regarded their furniture, but also in financial matters. The amount of their monthly income would indeed have made a modern shopman turn up his nose, and would not at the tariff of our modern pleasures have sufficed to defray the expenses of a single "Sunday out." But in order to assist their economical resolutions and enable them to resist temptation, Leon and Theodore adopted a system which they had seen practised by one of their friends, a poet, who was more wont to take baths in Hippocrene than in Pactolus. The receipt may be useful to other young persons who are at once tender-skinned and extravagant. When their modest income came in, if they received it in gold they first changed it into five-franc pieces. They then further changed these pieces into the smallest silver coin they could get, and, finally, they scattered the sum into a faggot of the thorniest brushwood procurable. This precaution made the hunt after it so troublesome, and indeed so painful, that when a spendthrift fancy took them they hesitated to gratify it, very much after the manner of a drunkard who prefers sobriety to the trouble of going down to the cellar. Thanks to this economical arrangement, they had sometimes been known not to reach the bottom of their purse much before the fifteenth of the month. On pay-day, however, before consigning the sum to their thorny cash-box, they were wont to subtract a proportion which was destined half to the needs of the intellect, and half to those of the heart. Under the first head came the acquisition of half a dozen volumes of poetry and literature. Under the second came an amorous pilgrimage made on the first Sunday of each month to Sceaux or Meudon, in the company of two pink bonnets which the hands of the wearers had themselves fashioned. The bonnets were labours of love, but in this respect they yielded the palm to two crowns wreathed of apple and orange blossoms which were destined for the day that was to see the quartette seek the mayor's office and the church.

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MURGER.

One of the bonnets, Leon's peculiar property, was named Laurence; the other answered to the name of Aline, and exercised over the heart of Theodore a tyranny which her subject did not find intolerable. The two girls were cousins and differed in beauty as in character. Aline was a brunette, wilful, flighty, and noisy. She was absolutely ignorant as far as book-learning went, but she knew all that instinct could teach her, and in Dame Nature's academy she would certainly have taken the first prize. The other, Laurence, was fair and gentle and quiet, and spoke with a voice as plaintive as the sigh of a reed. She had very pretty feet, which she did not mind showing, and which displayed blue shoes if not stockings. Indeed they accused her, in the shop where she was book-keeper, of occasionally making out the bills in verse. It is doubtful whether Lord Byron or plunkcake possessed her deepest affections. In the woods she admired the nightingale, but in a dish and truffled, she would have admired him more still. Such was Laurence. But the cousins, however much they differed, agreed entirely in being twenty years old, not merely in years, but in heart and soul and face.

Our two friends had made their acquaintance by one of those chances which seem sometimes more than chance. Their love had lasted three whole months without their having taken the trouble to investigate its nature or origin; and they were indeed by no means inclined to such investigation, just as a wise drinker takes care not to shake the bottle whence he draws his wine. Aline and Laurence worked in a shop of the neighbourhood, and lodged in a house not very far from the two friends, the windows being visible across the garden from the balcony before mentioned. But the distance was too great to allow them to see into the rooms. Accordingly Theodore had one day suggested to Leon that they should invest in a field-glass. "Why?" said Leon. "Well," replied Theodore, "from our balcony we should have every opportunity for contemplating the stars. Our neighbours of the observatory announce a forthcoming eclipse. That will be just our time. Besides,

the glass is a very nice one, and it costs only twenty francs. Will you pass the estimate?"—"My dear fellow," said Leon gravely, "I fear HENRY MURGER. that your astronomical fancy is, in other words, a wish to play the spy. You want to know what our neighbours are doing when they are at home. This is an injudicious curiosity; and it seems to me that a glass which might show us spots in our stars would be a very bad investment. If the girls are going to play us false, we shall not require optical apparatus to discover it. I refuse the vote." Whereupon Theodore appeared to give up the idea. A few days afterwards, however, as he was drinking beer in a café on the boulevard, he was accosted by an Alsatian Jew who sold padlocks, swordsticks, maps of the city, and other trifles. The fellow took out an opera-glass and offered it to Theodore. "The usual price is eighty francs," he said, "but you shall have it for forty." To get rid of him Theodore remarked that he would give half a franc for it. "It is yours," said the Alsatian, and when Theodore got home he had to excuse himself to Leon on the score of the bargain. But a few days afterwards, Aline, who was hunting through Theodore's possessions with much minuteness for a piece of sugar, discovered the glass. Instantly the fancy struck her to look at the Luxembourg clock, and leaning over the balcony she was so remarkably unfortunate as to let it drop into the street. It is equally remarkable that when it was picked up it was broken.

Some time after this little episode, Theodore presented himself at an early hour at the office of his father's agent, to draw his allowance. He was not received with much cordiality, and the agent explained to him that, as he had a difficulty with his father on business matters, he did not feel called upon to act as paymaster any longer. Theodore made no protests, and went away thinking it lucky that Leon was also drawing his stipend, which would give them something to go on with. Unluckily, at the very same moment Leon was experiencing a similar rebuff. He held what might be loosely called a private secretaryship, and

his employer being on a journey, Leon expected to receive his salary from his man of business. "But, HENRY MURGER, my dear sir," said the man of business, when Leon made his application, "M.

has left me an account from which it would appear that you have been paid in advance certain sums which amount to a month's salary; therefore there is nothing due to you this month. Come to me next month and you shall have the money."—"How lucky," said Leon to himself when he got into the street, "that Theodore has got his allowance!" But when the two met and learnt their fellowship in misfortune, they were both for a moment somewhat downcast. "Deuce take it," said Theodore. "Before I can let my father know, and hear from him, at least a week will have passed, and during that time we shall be in the condition of Job."—"And the worst of it is," said Leon, "that we shall not be able to take our holiday." Our holiday was the famous four-handed excursion which was wont to take place on the first Sunday of each month. The vote for this extravagance was a regular one of twenty francs. For in those days, with four five-franc pieces and no more, two good fellows and two pretty girls could amuse themselves from dawn to sunset, without for a minute feeling envious of the riches of more elegant couples, who were taking a country Sunday in the hopes of blowing off their ennui. On the contrary, it was not unfrequently the gold which showed itself jealous of the silver.

Here occurs one of the protestations in which Murger often indulges against the costlier and more vicious amusements of the time of his manhood as compared with those of his youth. The tale goes on—

While Theodore and Leon were in despair at the idea of the Sunday party being given up for want of money, they were visited by a young friend of theirs, who was the favourite dramatic author of a small neighbouring theatre

much patronised by students. He had no percentage on receipts, but he was not unfrequently paid as much as a hundred francs for a melo-drama in five acts, and was not expected to provide the scenery. When the piece ran fifty nights the manager asked him to breakfast; when it ran a hundred he asked him to dinner; and the summit of his ambition, never yet reached, was a run which might involve an invitation to supper. To-day he is not called Leopold, as he was then, and if he insisted that a Talma should be engaged to act one of his parts, no manager would dare to say him nay. "My children," said he to the friends when they had told him their difficulty, "personally I can't help you, but indirectly perhaps I can. Perpend, I am all-powerful with my manager, or at least I can do something with him. In a fortnight his own benefit comes off, and he wishes to 'utilise a splendid painting of Windsor Castle, which a rising artist of the neighbourhood has executed in return for a free admission. Unluckily there is not a single piece in the *répertoire* which will do for the scene. Write him a *vaudeville* in one act which has something to do with Windsor Castle, and I promise you at least forty francs for it, there."—"But," said Leon, "we want the money in three days."—"Well," said Leopold, "there are two of you, and you have three days for writing one act. Isn't that enough? Pray how long would you take to put a girdle round the earth?"—"But," said Leon again, "to make a play one must have an idea, and in a *vaudeville* there must be verses. I don't know how to write verses, and I am sure Theodore doesn't." "It is very easy," replied Leopold. "Each verse is usually composed of eight lines. In the first seven you say nothing, either because it is your nature to, or intentionally. In the eighth you make an effort and say something foolish. This is called the point; it is noticed, you repeat it, and there is your verse. Besides, there is no need for you to trouble yourselves about that; there is a copyist at the theatre who will make you admirable songs, as well as entries and exits for the chorus, at two francs a dozen.

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MURGER.

For three francs he will guarantee you an encore, but you have to supply the rhymes. Won't it do?"

HENRY MURGER. "For my part," said Theodore, "I am rather shy of seeing my name on the bills."—"Don't be afraid," said the other; "your name is not yet quite illustrious enough to set them on fire."

So Leon and Theodore made up their minds to take their comrade's counsel, and he carried them off to dinner in a little restaurant kept by an Englishman, who, when his customers asked for napkins, was wont to answer that they must be very slovenly people to want them. During dinner Leopold unfolded to his companions the results of his dramatic experience, and as Leon persisted in coming back to his theory that to make a piece you must have an idea, the dramatist proceeded to lay down his professional principles. "My dear children," said he, "nature and life surround us with ideas, and all we have got to do is to keep our eyes open. For instance, you see the gentleman who is carrying on negotiations with the cashier? That is an idea, and the results of it in drama are the *Quart d'Heure de Rabelais* and the *Epicure in a Fix*. Look at this other person who is wandering like a ghost round a table, because an intruder has taken his usual place. There is another idea; he is a monomaniac. Hence comes *The Monomaniac*, which some one has or must have written. If they have not, I will. See, again, that delicate girl who keeps the books, and is making up the bills wrong, while she is exchanging sweet glances with that clerk. There is another idea, an old one I grant you, like most other youthful ideas. 'Tis the idea of love. Well, you have only to suppose a gentleman coming in here to drink his punch and seeing those two babies. If he sees them in the right point of view, and if his name happen to be William Shakespeare, he will make you *Romeo and Juliet* out of that. You don't hunt for ideas, you find them. Waiter, bring me some tobacco!" The tobacco came, and as Leopold happened to look at the paper in which it was wrapped—"I told you so," he said; "here is your idea." And he showed them a page of an English news letter,

which happened to contain an anecdote of theatrical capabilities. "Take it! Shakespeare, whom we have just mentioned, would have made something of it which would see the world out; do your best to make it into a *vaudeville* which may at least see out the evening. You have got two days to do it in, and you are not working for posterity. Good-bye! the bill is paid!"

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MURGER.

"I wish," said Theodore, "that it had occurred to him to lend us a little money till our own comes in."—"He has thought of it," said Leon gravely; "but Leopold is modest in his kindness, and is afraid of hurting those whom he obliges. While we were putting on our coats at home I saw him stoop down and slip ten francs into the firewood, and he got quite red when the money jingled." Two days afterwards the two friends were sitting at a table in their balcony, reading over for the last time the piece which they were to give to Leopold that night. As they read they began to dispute as to the ending, for which each had his own plan; and in their warmth they did not notice that a leaf of the manuscript had been wafted off the table by the first puff of an approaching storm. As it happened, the paper, after falling at first in a neighbouring garden, was again caught up by the wind, which finally floated it through the open window of Aline's chamber. Meanwhile the dramatic partners continued their argument; and one of them, to prove his ending the best, began to search in the papers for the passage of which, as he said, it was logically the consequence. "What a nuisance," he cried at length impatiently, "I cannot find the scene of the governor."—"It is not difficult to recognise, however," said Leon, rummaging in his turn, "at least it is bad enough." The unsuccessful search before long begat a quarrel, each accusing the other of carelessness. "You have lost the scene of the governor," said Theodore; "if it had been the *ingénue* scene, which is all your own doing, it would not have been lost. You are a selfish brute, you only care for your own property, and yesterday you spoilt my set of handkerchiefs."—"I had eleven excellent reasons

for not spoiling my own," replied Leon with much coolness,

“and besides, if I lost your handkerchief,
HENRY
MURGER. what did you do with my umbrella? Cair,
that you are, what have you done with
my umbrella?”—“What is the good of an umbrella
except to lose?” replied Theodore; and the argument
was too strong for Leon’s logical mind. Still he went
on. “All the same, you are horribly careless. In the
first place, you have a fatal habit of lighting your pipe
with the first paper that comes to hand. If we were so
foolish as to possess any bank notes, I feel sure that you
would convert them to the most improper purposes. I am
certain that you have burnt the scene of the governor, and
as it is laid inside Windsor Castle, I hope for Queen
Victoria’s sake that the building was insured.”—“Non-
sense,” said Theodore; “this is trifling, nay, buffoonery.
You didn’t like the governor scene, which is mine, because
it interferes with the effect of the *ingénue* scene, which is
yours.”—“In other words,” said Leon, “you suspect my
integrity as a partner.” And they might have quarrelled
once more but that Leopold came in. “My children,”
said he, “you are expected this evening in the manager’s
study for the purpose of reading your work. He is so
pleased with you for giving him an opportunity of using his
new scene, that he intends to moisten the reading with a
cool tankard, but don’t be surprised if the price of it is
stopped out of your fee. You had better read it me first,”
added he, pointing to the papers. “Impossible,” said
Theodore; “Leon has lost the scene of the governor. It
is the very centre of the action.”—“Never mind,” said
Leopold, “read away, and when you come to the lost scene
tell me its contents, that I may see the total effect.”—“But
how about the style?” said Theodore with gravity. “Do
you mean to tell me that a piece written in two days has
got any style? Phrases you mean, I suppose; let them
alone, and let us have the masterpiece. Up goes the
curtain.” Theodore began to read, and when he came to
the lost scene he gave the gist of it. At the end Leon
insisted that Leopold should hear his ending as well; and

it was this that the great dramatist preferred. "My children," said he, "your piece belongs to that order of masterpieces which should not be protracted over twenty minutes. Among other superfluities which it would be well to cut out, I must particularly mention the scene which you have lost. However great may have been the beauties of its style, they could not possibly equal its absolute uselessness. Chance in losing it for you has executed a masterly improvement."—"What!" cried Theodore in consternation, "cut out the governor?"—"Yes," replied Leopold firmly; "the governor must be cashiered. Reason, common sense, and good taste demand it. Let us go hence, for the manager expects us at six o'clock. You will be good enough to show signs of nervousness when you enter his presence."

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MURGER.

When they left the theatre that night they were forty francs the richer, for Leopold had refused, at any rate for the present, to be repaid his loan. Before going home they went to see Aline and Laurence, to tell them to be ready the next day, which was that of the excursion. Laurence was out, but Aline gave Leon the key of her room that he might wait for her. When he had lighted the candles he noticed on the side-table a sheet of paper, the writing of which caught his eye. It was no other than the famous scene, the loss of which had caused his friend such poignant grief. Seeing that it was crumpled, he at first supposed that Laurence had used it to wrap something up. But on the back of the sheet he found the following lines, which were in an unknown hand: "My dear child," said this inscription, "I came to see you to-day that we might have an explanation. I have told you, and I tell you again, that I hate not being able to see you when I wish, and this your work prevents. I hate coming to this out-of-the-way place, and climbing up these endless stairs. If any of my friends met me hereabouts they would think I was a student. You must make up your mind to leave your shop. I can't wait any longer now, and so I write these lines on a piece of paper which the wind has just

blown in, to tell you what I want. If you don't agree, I fear that I shall be obliged to wish you

HENRY
MURGER. good-bye. If you accept, you need only send, me back the pass-key, which I left with you, this evening. I am off to Baden, where I will take you if you do what I wish. Dozens of other girls would be only too happy. Good-bye, pretty child; remember, if you do not answer, it will be good-bye for good. Yours, ANATOLE DE ———."—"I don't think," said Leon to himself, "that we want Theodore's opera-glass to make out what *that* means." Then he took out his pencil and wrote at the bottom of the letter: "*Postscript*.—My dear child, at this season all decent people are going to watering-places. My health, which has suffered seriously, obliges me to quit the capital, and take the waters of Asnières. You may therefore go to Baden with M. Anatole, who wants to take you. Yours, the late LEON." Just as he was going away the door opened, and Laurence came in. He placed the scene of the governor before her, kissed her hand, took his hat, and made for the door. "Wait a minute," said she, and she showed him, opening a little blotting-book, a letter written in a school-girl hand. "SIR—I am glad to receive your farewell, and I shall stay where I am. I am not ill, and I don't want to go to Baden. I liked you for a little because your name was Anatole, and then I didn't like you at all, so good-bye. If I have made any faults in spelling, you must excuse me. Grammar does not come naturally to me. Yours, ALINE."—"Well," said Leon, "what does that prove?"—"Can't you see that when she got his letter she came to show it me, and forgot it here, as well as the answer, which I made her copy out properly?" "It was not a bad answer though," said he; "then I am to believe that it was not me." . . . "Oh," said Laurence, "I should never like a man because his name was Anatole. If it were George now I am not so sure."—"Because of Lord Byron, I suppose," said Leon. "But please let me know in that case."—"Oh yes," she said with much frankness; "it is too much trouble to humbug people. Aline always looked as if she were on thorns. But you

won't tell Theodore?" and she put the tell-tale scene in the candle.

A fortnight afterwards the friends, with ^{HENRY} MURGER, the two girls, were present at the representation of their piece, which was a great success. "It is all very well," said Theodore, "but I'm sorry for the scene of the governor."—"You would not like it if you were to see it," said Leon; as he turned to Laurence, who was bowing to a young man. "Who are you bowing to, dear?" said he. "It is some one in the shop."—"Whose name is?" . . . "George."

Les Amours d'un Grillon et d'une Étincelle runs as follows:—

In a wheat-field in Germany there lived on terms of friendship an Italian beetle and a cricket. The beetle, who had lived his life, possessed the second sight which is called experience, and which sees clearly and at the first glance to the bottom of the subject, which shows the mud under the clear water, and the reality under the illusion. Besides this the Italian was a light-o'-love, and few days passed without his adding some new conquest to his list. . . .

The cricket was a lively contrast to his companion. Like most grasshoppers and crickets, he was a poet, and he lived poet-fashion, rather in an imaginary world than in the real one. He had early been left an orphan, for within two days his father had been trodden underfoot by a child who was gathering flowers, and his mother had been carried off by a swallow seeking food for her young. The remembrance of this double misfortune changed the cricket's natural melancholy to deep sadness, and he spent almost his whole days at the bottom of his hole. At blaze of noon, when his brethren of the furrows made the air ring with their clamour, he did not join them but remained musing alone. At even, when the concert began again, and when the frogs of the marsh hard by took their part, he still held aloof and still dreamed. Only at early

morning he would steal softly forth, so as not to wake his friend, when the latter was not on one of his expeditions, and would climb to the summit of an ear of corn which he had chosen as an observatory, and where he spent whole hours in gazing at the sky.

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The beetle (who has been brought from Italy in the bouquet held at a ball by a lady on the eve of an elopement) is a very lively and pleasing personage, to whom I regret that space prevents my doing justice. He is the incarnation of good-humoured and epicurean shrewdness, and does his utmost to convince the cricket of the uselessness of his poetical reveries. He feels sure that the cricket is in love, and determines to find out the object with the magnanimous and disinterested intention of sparing his friend his own victorious competition.

One morning he followed the cricket as he went as usual to his observatory. The beetle hid himself in a tuft of grass, and watched his friend as, perched on the ear, he gazed as if entranced on the sky, and followed with his eyes the flight of a cloud from east to west. Suddenly the cloud passed, and the morning star hidden hitherto showed her glittering face. At this the cricket quivered on his perch and began to sing loudly. This was his song—

“What art thou, fair star? Perhaps a flower that has bloomed in the gardens of paradise, whom the maidens gather before the sun has had time to wither thee. If thy perfume does not reach us, it is because it is too far from heaven to earth—too far, alas! from thee to me.

“What art thou, fair star? The cloud of rosy plumage which hid thee just now, and which seemed like a seraph floating through the blue, has left thee behind in his flight. Canst thou be a diamond dropped by the heavenly way

from the robes of the divine wanderer? How bright thou art, and how dark am I! How far it is from thee to me.

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MURGER.

"What art thou, fair star? Art thou a dew-drop trembling in the lilies that archangels bear? Art thou hope, shining in the morning, and seen no more at night? Art thou the smile of God blessing His creation at its awakening? Or art thou perchance the spirit of poetry whose voice all the songs of the morning do but echo? Thy song is too high for us to hear it, and it is far from thee to me.

"Whoever thou art, fair star, I love thee. Before I saw thee in the heavens I had seen thee in my own soul. Thou didst illumine my solitude, and when I saw thee with mine eyes, I said, Is it then my dream which has flown from my heart to shine aloft? I love thee, fair star, though it be far from thee to me."

The honest beetle is quite aghast at this sentimental outburst, and discourses the most admirable common sense to the enraptured lover. He tries to excite his jealousy, but in vain, and is not more successful in a touching history of his own early passion for a white rosebud which was sundered by the death of the flower, and only consoled by a less ethereal and more solid affection for some one else. This rather shocks the cricket, who looks on his friend very much as the other bards looked on Tannhäuser at the Wartburg. However, the beetle's good temper is imperturbable, and he predicts for his friend a second edition of his own experiences.

Shortly afterwards the cricket became very sad. He had not seen the star for a week, and the aspect of things had altogether changed. The blue sky was hidden behind dense clouds like great black curtains, and the sun could scarcely

show his pale face through them each morning. The box-trees were fallow and withered, the wild-rose bushes were nothing but thorns, the meadows shivered beneath the north winds which had replaced the summer breeze, and the swallows, shuddering under their plumage, made for the East. One day the cricket found his ear of corn laid low, and saw the last smile of the sun, which seemed to be following the swallows. It was long since the nightingale had ceased to sing, the butterflies had fled with the flowers, and the leaves were dropping from the trees.

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MURGER.

The beetle explains the meaning of all this to the wondering cricket. Winter is coming, and he, the beetle, must die. As for the cricket, there is a chance for him; he can get shelter in the chimney of the nearest cottage and wait for the spring. For himself, he has the true spirit of the Lucretian *conviva satur*. He has lived his life, his loves the flowers are dead, and he is ready to follow.

The cricket wept, for he was much attached to his friend, although on certain points they were not of one mind. But the hope of seeing his star once more in the spring decided him, and after embracing the Italian, he set out for the cottage, which he reached that evening. When the poor man to whom it belonged saw him come in, he said, "Here is the luck of the house; we must have a blaze." And he threw a handful of wood on the hearth; but it was green, and made more smoke than fire.

When he had chosen his nest in one of the cracks of the chimney, the poet of the fields made a pilgrimage round the narrow space which was thenceforward to be his home. The aspect of his dingy kingdom was not well suited to dispel his sadness, and at first he was inclined to regret having quitted the open country with its white snow-cloak for this prison with soot-smirched walls and smoky atmosphere.

"What will become of me?" said he, as he retired to his 'crack, "and how can I wait for the spring in this dark solitude?" Then he did as folk often do when, having nothing good in sight for the present, they take refuge in the past which has been a little happier, and shut their eyes on exterior things, so as to use the inner eye better. He thought over all his days. They had begun in mourning, and reminded him of his entry into the world, an orphan, and weeping already, as all do on the threshold of life. He remembered his youth in the German land, where melancholy seems inbred in things and persons. He saw once more the gray sky, where the sun now and then ventured to shoot forth a pale ray. He heard the nightly duets of the breeze and the brooklet, the harmonies which had given birth to the harmony in his own soul. He remembered his earliest poetical efforts, improvisations ready fashioned in his dreams, and which he had uttered almost without a thought. He thought of his meeting with the beetle, that open-air philosopher and pleasure-lover, who had at the same time a love of truth. He recalled the sharp logic of his friend, and how often it had fallen blunted from his own golden dreams. Then suddenly, in the melancholy mirror of his memories, came the reflection of the morning star, with her moist and gentle radiance. Then did the poet's musings become deeper still. He ensconced himself in one single thought, around which his swarming hopes gathered, and so was happy. He forgot the dulness of the seldom-lighted hearth, the darkness of the cabin. The black depths of the fireplace were no longer black for him, for the memory of his love spread over them an expanse of azure in which shone the morning splendours of his star. And thus, perched on the dogs of the grate as once upon his corn-ear, the cricket would pass whole days singing the song which he had composed for his mistress. But the good peasant of the cottage thought he had given shelter to but a melancholy guest, and would much rather have had the cheerful chirp of the ordinary cricket than the poet's plaintive elegy.

On Christmas Eve he invited two neighbours to see the

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day in, and for this occasion he lighted his Yule log, a fine billet of oak with stout dry bark, which soon began to crackle and blaze gloriously. Warmed by this unaccustomed heat, the cricket, who was sleeping in his crack and dreaming of his mistress just as if he had been awake, drew near the hearth to thank his host who was giving him such a treat, but at the minute a neighbour stirred the log, which immediately crackled and shot forth a spark. "Ah! heavens," said the cricket, "there is my star come back." But the tiny spangle of flame had already fled, and another followed, to be in like manner extinguished, then a third, then a thousand others, so that the poet could hardly count them. He thought himself still asleep and dreaming, but a fresh spark passed so near him, dazzling his eyes and his heart, that he could doubt no longer. His dream had come true, and his mistress the star was really before him. Then, in hopes of staying her flight, he sounded his tenderest notes, and addressed an appeal to the winged creature which still fled before him. Every verse as it burst from his heart seemed to shake from its wings the tears in which it had been steeped; yet the spark fled still ever brighter and faster. The singer gathered up all his dreams and flung them together in a strain which cold reason did not shape, and the verse poured forth more freely and in more passionate disarray. And still the spark floated on. He uttered all the hopes he had formed in his solitude, but still it fled. Then suddenly he was seized with one of those moments of delirium which occur but once in a life. All his desires, all his dreams, in their endless variations of the same theme, all his thoughts, all the nameless things which live in the heart, and by which it lives, and which quit it at once when passion breaks it,—all this came forth at once in one great flood of sobbing verse, and the poet, having once caught up the whole of his love, and uttered it in a supreme prayer, waited for the passage of the spark. His post was red-hot by this time and his pain was sharp, but he heeded it not.

"Will she still fly?" he sighed. But the spark halted for a moment in the chimney corner. "She is waiting," he

cried; "she is waiting! she loves me!" Then, with a happy timidity, he drew near his beloved mistress. The spark shone on the dark background of the hearth, like a diamond in an ebony case; and remembering the brilliant smiles of the morning star, the cricket cried, "She is just as I saw her first in my dreams, as I saw her in the heaven where she was so far, and now she is close to me." Then he began to celebrate his happiness in song. But the wind prisoned in the chimney stayed the flight of the verse, and scattered it. The spark was still stationary in the angle of the hearth, but she seemed to pale. Her lover, as he slowly drew near, sang constantly, and touched in his song on all the new hopes that welled up in his soul in the long-wished-for presence of his idol; yet still she grew paler. For a moment, at the passionate voice of her lover, she seemed to answer with a brighter flash, and as he approached her light grew clearer. No tenderer glance had ever come from the golden eyes of the morning star herself as she had listened to the dawn-songs of the cricket perched on his stalk. The lover still advanced and gazed on his mistress, who seemed to call him with a quiver of her brightness. He made one last step, and was so close to her that they touched. Then it seemed to him that he had been struck blind,—for the spark was extinguished. He looked at the place where a second before she had been so brilliant, and there was nothing there but a speck of ash. "Oh, my dream! my love!" said the poet-lover. Then he went back to his crack and remained silent.

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These two extracts show, I think, fully and fairly, the moral as well as the literary peculiarities of the bulk of Murger's work. Nor does that work call for much further comment. He has two points of view from which he considers the facts of which he treats. One is a view of humorous common sense, which delights in exhibiting the

absurd side of things, not ill-temperedly or morosely, but with geniality and an abundance of quaint side-thought and illustration. The other is a purely poetical, and more or less melancholy point of view, from which, again without bitterness or exaggeration, he bewails the mutability and the unsatisfactoriness of things. It is worth noticing, too, that Murger, like many other and greater novelists, is very limited in his choice of subjects, at least of the subjects which he could handle happily. He knew the Bohemia of his novels thoroughly, and he clung to this, only making rare excursions out of it; excursions which are still more rarely profitable. Yet his work has no sameness, except to those who see nothing of a story but its argument, and who are ready to cry, *Connu !* if an author, after once describing a grisette jilting a student, afterwards endeavours to describe a student jilted by a grisette. The type may be the same but the individual is different, and the genius of the writer is shown precisely in the way in which the eternal old theme becomes new by his treatment of it. There is another excellence about his handling which deserves notice, because it also is common to most novelists of the better class. Each reproduction of the type adds something to our conception of it. Rodolphe, and Marcel, and Lazare, and Theodore, and Leopold, and a score more, are all Bohemians, going through very much the same adventures. But while on the one hand

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they are all original, on the other their originalities all derive directly from the general type, and go to furnish forth HENRY MURGER. the idea of the *ewig-böhmische* in our minds. This is exactly as it should be, and it contrasts very strongly with the practice of certain other writers who, with an immense number of nominally different characters, and a consequent reputation for untiring fertility, have at bottom but a meagre conception of any type, and never give it us fully and fairly drawn. The singular justice which marks Murger's conception and drawing is also worth noticing, and sprang, I think, from pure literary talent. The prose ballad of which I have endeavoured to 'translate part shows this literary skill remarkably. Not even in German itself can I remember any better picture of *clair de lune* sentiment.

I am not disposed to agree with those who hold that Murger's comparatively early death at the age of forty deprived the world of much novel or remarkable work. More sketches of the old themes he might have given us, and they could not have failed to be charming. Nor is it likely that he would, like his (in some sort) analogue Gavarni, have sunk into morose and visionary sterility when age and changed circumstances had put an end to the life that once he led. He had too kindly a soul for that, though there are not wanting in his later work touches of almost querulous discontent with the changed order of the world.

But I think that his mind had been too thoroughly engrossed by the one idea ever to entertain another profitably. The sadness and the jollity, the vicissitudes and the consolations, of one special, artificial, and in a way transitory state of life, he had thoroughly seized, and has completely expressed. But he had not the faculty of adaptation which gave Diderot and Gautier, an unlike and yet like pair, long and fruitful lives of hard and varied work. He would either have gone on doing worse the things which he had once done admirably, or he would have—as has happened more than once in literature—done new things badly without much censure, because he had done the old things well. The death of Murger seems to me better than the lives of the Campbells and the Lamartines.

One word must be said of Murger's influence on his readers. It has been great, and I suppose on the whole it has been bad, despite his own earnest protests against the follies, the unreason, and the suicidal expectations of his Bohemians. As Gavarni is declared to have actually sent voluntary pilgrims to Clichy, so have the ways of Bohemia, with their dismal termination, been peopled, we are told, by these books. This is unfortunate of course, but I cannot see that Murger is to blame for it. There is no attempt in his books—even if we put aside the direct dissuasives to which I have alluded—to conceal the truth or to throw a glamour over falsehood. The reader

who takes his Bohemia for a *pays de cocagne* or an earthly paradise of any kind must indeed be strangely constituted.

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Mr. Matthew Arnold, in a well-known passage, has formulated his idea of the literary and moral aspirations of France in the quotation, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" and there is perhaps no writer who reminds one of this more than Murger. He is indeed rather Ishmael in the wilderness of Beersheba than Ishmael in the wilderness of Paran. His complaints of the order of the universe seem simple enough. There is so much bread on earth, and yet it is so hard to earn; the sun is in heaven, and yet the winter winds are so unkind; the fair women of the world are so many, and yet no one of them will sail with him "*à la rive fidèle où l'on aime toujours.*" But these complaints he has put into a book—for, as he himself said, he has practically written but one—which is in its way a book final and perfect. Its literary charms, though great, are not supreme; its subject is limited, and its moral is vulnerable. But it strikes truly and skilfully a string which has vibrated at one time or another in the heart and brain of every man who has brain or heart, and therefore it deserves a place in the literature of humanity.

XII

VICTOR CHERBULIEZ

(1878¹)

ONE remarkable difference between M. Victor Cherbuliez and most other French novelists must have struck his readers. He deals little, at least in his earlier work, with types; he is all for the individual. And it is a very curious discovery for the student of comparative criticism to find that this peculiarity of his is at the bottom of such objections to his work as have been made by French critics. He has sometimes been accused of *invraisemblance*, of affectation, of eccentricity, and the like, and the accusation must seem odd to those who know that it has not been brought against work which to English eyes deserves the charge infinitely more. But the explanation is not very far to seek. The critic looks for the plot or character under review in his bundle of types, and cannot find it; eccentricity is, therefore,

¹ See Preface.

proved at once. In the opposite case the animal, however strange in its proceedings, is seen immediately to be of a known ^{VICTOR} _{CHERBULIEZ.} species and admitted accordingly. Any one who wishes to see exactly what is meant may contrast Gilbert Savile in *Le Comte Kostia* teaching Stephane botany, with the estimable hero of Feydeau's *La Comtesse de Chalis* teaching his mistress modern history. But before making any more general remarks about M. Cherbuliez let us see how, as a matter of fact, he does go to work ; and for this purpose let us take what is perhaps his most striking, if not his best, novel.

Le Roman d'une Honnête Femme, according to a favourite custom of M. Cherbuliez, is couched in the form of a narrative, not by the author, but by the principal character. Isabelle de Loanne writes the record of her experiences to a Jesuit priest who has long been her confidant and adviser, and who at the date of the opening of the book has gone as a missionary to Canada. These devices for securing an intimate, and at the same time reasonably *vraisemblable*, biography are not always particularly successful ; but the sternest Protestant must admit that the institution of directors affords unusual facilities to the novelist in the endeavour. In this instance the Abbé has been something more to Isabelle than a mere confessor. She has lived up to the age of four-and-twenty—it is a favourite age with M. Cherbuliez by the bye—a sort of Robinson Crusoe

existence in one of the valleys of the Jura. Her father and the Abbé have been her only companions, and the former, though devotedly fond of her, is perhaps fonder still of archæology, and gives up the greater part of his time to his library, his cabinets, and his excavations of the Roman remains in the neighbourhood. Thus the Abbé becomes to Isabelle what I shall let her tell in her own words:—

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It has been said that no one ever remained in the middle of a week. The worst of this, regarded as a consolation, is that no one is free from the obligation of beginning a fresh week. I found this out after your departure. The first few days which followed seemed to be endless. Your visits were indeed never very frequent, but they recurred at regular intervals. I hoped for them, I looked forward to them, they were the one event of my life. And then—do not be vexed—you did not, whatever you might think, come alone. There was always an invisible guest in your company, namely, the world, the world in cassock it is true, but still the world. You knew the news and you did not mind telling it. Never was piety better natured and more cheerful than yours, and though your order has always piqued itself on making religion agreeable, I doubt its holding your match. At the risk of provoking you I shall add that there never was a saint better instructed in the affairs of earth than you. You love it, poor earth! without giving heaven any cause for jealousy. What did we not use to talk of? Trifles never came amiss to us, for, with your pardon, you have a spirit of detail about you, and in this respect your reverence is a little feminine. Even the subtlest of mankind are wont to generalise everything and look with interest merely at the sum total; only women know the value of a detail.

One may easily imagine the 'loss to a young lady of such a gracious pastor as this, and the small efforts which ^{VICTOR CHERÉULIEZ.} her excellent papa would make to supply the deficiency, or, indeed, to comprehend its existence. It so happens, moreover, that, just at this moment, good M. de Loanne has other matters of especial moment to occupy him. A Roman villa and a statuette which he decides to be a Nemesis have transported him to the seventh heaven. He conveys the Nemesis home, and spends the winter in looking at it and at two Greek vases, while his daughter plays Mozart to him; occasionally also in descanting on his unrivalled happiness. In vain Isabelle points out to him the danger of such talk in the very presence of Nemesis. He will not hear of it, and declares that the goddess has constituted^d herself a sort of guardian spirit to the house.

*In the spring comes an event. The Baroness de Ferjeux, châtelaine of a neighbouring country house, takes it into her head to visit it after some ten years' absence. She is Parisian or nothing, and, of course, resolves on disinterring the girl who has been leading so unnatural a life.

"My dear, you are a wonder," she used to say to me. "May I die if I could have thought of finding a girl of twenty-four like you in these horrible woods. I have tried to make you out, but it is no use. You are the oddest of mixtures, you pupil of an archæologist and a Jesuit; you are neither Parisian nor provincial. You have not got the

stamp of Paris, and yet one can't find out what is wanting.

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CHERBULIEZ. Do you know, I have a great mind to decide that you are an old statue—a Galatea, perhaps—which M. de Loanne has dug up in one of those hideous caverns that I was amiable enough to go and see, and where I ruined a most lovely muslin. The Lord have mercy on antiquaries! but do tell me if you are quite sure you are alive. Will you swear it? For my part, I think if one scraped you one would come to the marble. Don't be angry; I don't mean to call you a fossil. You are an antique, a classic, and classics have no particular date.

It is unnecessary to say that the Baroness determines to marry Isabelle—not, she takes care to remark, that she has any very high idea of the institution of matrimony, but simply because no better has yet been devised, and especially because there is no other approach to the blessed estate of widowhood. Soon she becomes more definite, and remembers that she has a most admirable nephew, the Marquis Max de Lestang, who has sown all his wild oats and got rid of all his illusions, while he has preserved all his fortune and all his good looks, and is therefore in a state of ideal fitness for marriage. Isabelle, as is natural, first laughs and then gets angry; the latter, more particularly, when the cunning Baroness has succeeded in making poor M. de Loanne very unhappy about his neglect of his paternal duties. But neither laughter nor ill-temper has any effect on the inexorable Madame de Ferjeux. The ideal marquis makes his appearance, and skilfully addressing himself to M. de

Loanne's blind side by feigning archæological tastes, prevails victoriously. The courtship is admirably described, but as VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ. it is not the main subject of the book we must not delay over it. Suffice it that they are married, the Nemesis, which her father persists in regarding as Isabelle's guardian angel, forming part of the dowry, and being duly consigned to the Marquis's château in Dauphiné. After a honeymoon in England the pair go to Paris, and the situation becomes actual. During the honeymoon Isabelle la Sérieuse, as the Abbé has named her, has noticed that her husband, while apparently enamoured enough in all conscience, regards her a little too much as a *fait accompli*. She tells him as much one day, and he answers her more or less playfully; but the conviction is left with her that he is by no means awake to the necessity of keeping and deserving what he has won. However, this only occurs to her now and then. They go to Paris, and her anxious chaperon, the Baroness, is not at all satisfied with Isabelle's *début*. She gives herself no trouble to win the women's graces, and still less to ingratiate herself with the men, so that while a certain clique of artists goes into ecstasies over her, the general public feels itself snubbed, and revenges itself accordingly. Stirred up by Madame de Ferjeux's remonstrances, Isabelle takes the trouble to shine for one night; but the game seems to her so little worth the candle, that

she proposes to her husband next day that they shall depart at once for the Dauphiné château. He assents, as he does to most things, though in secret he regards it as a confession of defeat, and, to the intense scandal of the Baroness, they leave Paris. The sketch of the sight of the Château de Lestang is too good an example of M. Cherbuliez's descriptive powers to be omitted :—

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In the foreground, between two jutting hills crowned with wood, lay sloping fields planted with almond-trees, some of them in full flower, some stretching out their rosy bunches of buds ready to blossom. Below this came a wood of ilex studded with clumps of oak, which formed large blotches of copper red with their withered leaves; still farther the Berre rolling its green waves through an intricate course, whose banks made up a festoon of folds. Beyond it the huge plain of Grignan, bounded on the west by the Rhone, whose bed was indicated by silver-gray haze, was dominated on the east by the hills of the Lance, their slopes reddened with oak-woods, their tops whitened with snow, and their hollows boldly scored with deep sweet purple shadows. On this plain, furrowed with long ranges of cypress, rose in a line the rock of Grignan, and to the right the mound crowned with the Tower of Chamaret, an ancient watch turret which, built in troubled times, had not yet met with its restorer, and which seemed to count the centuries as it guarded the plain. In the background rolled the Lez between its steep and poplar-crowned bank, a line of hills following it as it receded, and still farther yet another line, which in its turn gave place to the rounded hills of Valreas; all these heights followed the semicircle from east to west, rising gradually like the steps of a huge amphitheatre. At last, commanding the whole, soared the Ventour, with its hoary crest, "even as," says the Provençal poet, "an ancient shepherd seats himself among the

mountain pines and the beeches, and watches his flock of mountains spread at his feet." Beyond and above all these heights floated white and red clouds that seemed pregnant with light, and far to the south-east, in the indentation of the Rhone, the Tower of Chamaret threw its black profile on a sky of pearl shaded with orange and rose.

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It is in this promising scene that the romance proper begins. For some time there is no sign of the rising of the *lune rousse*, and all goes well. It so happens, however, that Max has to go on business to Nîmes, and during his absence a mischievous neighbour takes occasion to inform Isabelle that her husband has formerly had a violent flirtation with a certain Madame Mirveil, who still abides in the neighbourhood. Of this she thinks at first very little. But her husband comes back in a very bad temper, and the first rays of the red moon begin to appear. Something more than a suspicion comes to Isabelle that he has renewed his correspondence with Madame Mirveil, and one night, finding him out of the house at a late hour, she goes to his room. There she finds two letters unfinished, but open, one addressed to Madame Mirveil, the other to herself. The first, though written in a dubiously amatory style, establishes the fact of the relations between the two before the Marquis's marriage; the other contains a sort of monologue, in which M. de Lestang informs his wife of his views and intentions as a husband. He had been bewitched for a time, but his absence has relieved him of the

spell. He has seen through her, and his great soul cannot endure anything he has seen through ; she is only a feeble woman, after all, and he cannot endure feebleness.

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To do the Marquis justice, neither of these pieces of coxcombry appears to have been ever intended to reach its address, both being written soliloquies composed according to a dangerous habit of his. However, it may be imagined what effect they produce on the reader. Fortunately she is no *femmelette*, and her indignant pity for her husband's folly almost equals her grief, and enables her to bear it. She wanders into the gallery where the Nemesis stands, determined to wait for her husband's return. It should be mentioned that the same indignant neighbour, who is also a lover of Madame Mirveil, has threatened to turn his bloodhounds loose on any nightly visitors to her, and that this has apparently excited M. de Lestang's childish propensity to being dared.

Worn out with fatigue I sank upon a seat in front of the statue. I sat for some time without seeing her, but at last I mechanically raised my eyes. As I recognised her my anger, which had changed into sullen misery, blazed up again. Had she not served as go-between to myself and my calamity ? But in a moment my wrath fell and I was softened. The goddess transported me into the scenes where she and I had dwelt together. Once more I saw Louveau : the smoke issuing from its roof, the court where my pigeons were waiting for me, my dog crouching at the threshold, the quiet valley fading away into the fog, the sad but friendly faces of its gray rocks, the stars rising over the

pines, the hills which had long hidden me from the world, the hollow lanes and solitary by-ways where my idle dreams had so long wandered, and which had heard again and again my foolish sighs for the unknown. . . . How thankless and blind I had been! How easily I had swallowed the treacherous bait! Why had my mad wishes thus summoned misfortune? It had come, and I had rushed to meet it; it held its prey and would never quit it. The thought made me shudder as I heard afar off the baying of watch-dogs. "Ah," cried I, clasping my hands, "if they bring him home wounded and bleeding perhaps I can pardon, but if he comes back successful and triumphant——" I could go no further; my fancy had shown me something which held me dumb.

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Already the dawn was approaching and gray shadows were stealing over the sky. I began to distinguish vaguely the outlines of tree and hill, and the wild fury of the wind had dropped. Before the house steps were crunching the gravel and all my blood rushed to my heart. Soon a door opened, a rustling followed and a shadow advanced up the staircase. I rose and came forward, Max remaining motionless on the topmost step. I stopped two paces from him and looked at him steadily, as after a first start of surprise he leant on the balustrade and waited for me to speak. In his eyes I seemed to see insult and defiance. Then I tried to speak but my tongue froze, my limbs sank under me and I fell senseless on the floor.

During an illness of several days, Isabelle has time to reflect on her course of action, and she decides upon it. As soon as she recovers, she seeks an interview with her husband, and instead of making a scene, as he has anticipated and perhaps wished, she very calmly tells him that she is well aware of his state of mind, and proposes a *ménage* on the eighteenth-century model, the

proprieties to be preserved, and each to go his or her own way whenever outward decency does not forbid. He endeavours to carry off the matter lightly, but she has much the better of him at the game of sarcasm, and he is obliged to consent. For some weeks they persist in a *tête-à-tête* of armed neutrality, and she can see perfectly well that the amusement of the endeavour—as to the success of which he evidently has no doubt—to overcome her defence, has become the chief object of his coxcombship's mind. The situation is as trying to her as it would be to any honest and loving woman, and to gain time she departs, as by agreement she is free to do, to visit her father. But my lord marquis has no notion of his amusement being thus interrupted, and summons her home under pretext of having invited a large number of summer guests. She returns at once, and acts the hostess to admiration, altogether astonishing her unstable husband and winning golden opinions from the visitors, who have no suspicion of the true state of affairs, though not a few of them endeavour, as in duty bound, to make love to her, and are by no means pleased at the snubs they receive. At length Max, seeing that others value what he has slighted, makes overtures of peace, which his wife, though still hopelessly in love with him, treats as they deserve; and finally, pushed to extremities, he proves to her that she is wrong in her suspicions of any post-nuptial

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improprieties on his part with Madame Mirveil. She points out to him that this demonstration is rather late in the ^{VICTOR} day, and in his vexation at the rebuff ^{CHERBUIEZ.} he loses his self-command and rushes off to Paris without paying her, as the compact requires, the compliment of informing her of his intention. She receives terrible descriptions of his doings there, and in a moment of lost self-command hurries off to the capital. But her good angel makes her witness of an interview which sends her back to Dauphiné, without any one being the wiser, and in Dauphiné she finds an unexpected consolation. She has been far too high-minded to resort to the expedient which is called in vulgar English a "shoe-horn," that is to say, to exciting jealousy as a reviver of love. But chance throws her in the way of a young man who has, to the intense disgust of his friends, decided on embracing the religious life, and who, like many such, is by no means certain whether an earthly or an un-earthly Paradise is in reality what he wants. She takes him under her wing at first from pity, and everybody knows what the offspring of pity is. Max returns, and though he renews his instances for an armistice, his manner of solicitation is a great deal too cynical to have any effect. Through the ill-nature of the same neighbour, he is made aware of the existence of the young man, and, as may be expected, his coxcombry engages and conquers his cynicism. He becomes more and more

pressing in his interviews with his wife, insisting, with an odd mixture of philosophy and foolishness, on the disadvantages of a pious lover. She still holds her ground, and at last, though her intercourse with the candidate for La Trappe has been strictly platonic, exclaims with sublime effrontery, "Et que savez vous, monsieur, si je ne me suis pas donnée?" The effect on a forcible-feeble nature is not to be doubted. He rushes off, quite forgetting the agreement, for his hunting-knife, and in warding it off Isabelle receives a slight wound. The incident nearly ruins her. Intent more upon saving her very harmless lover than upon commonplace vengeance, she actually writes a letter proposing flight. But her better nature returns, and she withdraws it in time. Meanwhile her husband has recovered from his frenzy. He determines to go to America, where the Civil War is raging, and to seek death there. In a letter in which coxcombry is for the first time absent, he tells her of his purpose, and, avowing himself completely beaten and his theory of the universe upset, implores her to pause at least for his death before in any way committing herself. He awaits her answer at a neighbouring town. The answer may be easily divined. She has won the game, and her just pride no more interferes with her love. The religious youth receives an abrupt dismissal, which is perhaps a little hard on him, Isabelle throws herself into her husband's arms, and all is

said. Not quite all, perhaps, for M. de Loanne, visiting the happy pair afterwards, decides that the Nemesis is not a ^{VICTOR} NEMESIS at all, but a Psyche—"Psyche, who would at any price know what she loved: who lost all and by good luck won all back again, thereby giving, it may be, a perilous precedent. And yet one never really possesses anything save that which one has run the risk of losing."

Little comment is necessary on this story. It is perhaps not very easy for Englishmen to sympathise with the Marquis Max de Lestang. His absolutely ludicrous theory of the feminine sex, excusable in an English undergraduate or a French *étudiant*, but certainly not in a man of thirty of either nation; his childish attempts to shake his wife's nerves by walking on rotten rafters, brandishing knives, and so forth; and his almost instant collapse when the tables are turned on him and his own forehead is menaced with the appendages which Amiens celebrates in the famous song, are despicable enough. But when it is remembered that the story is told, not by the author, but by the wife, the case is altered, and one only feels a certain sentiment of regret that the foolish fellow should have had so infinitely better a wife than he deserved. As to the portrait of Isabelle itself, it is admirable. But it is, I think, quite easy to see that the whole conception of the book is foreign to the accepted

types of French fiction. Judging by those types,

Isabelle must indeed seem a monster.

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CHERBULIEZ. She has neither the virtues nor the
vices of the average heroine; indeed,
one cannot help secretly fancying that very few
Frenchmen would care to have so masterful a
spouse, even if they were thereby guaranteed
from the danger with which it pleases them,
in fiction, to represent themselves as constantly
menaced. There must also appear to them
to be something anarchic and of evil example
in the complete rout and vanquishment of such
a perfect romance-hero as Max de Lestang.
But this refusal of accepted types and rearrange-
ment of the ordinary laws of fictitious justice is
altogether characteristic of the author.

It would appear that M. Cherbuliez, probably
under the influence of Goethe, began his career
as a writer of books by publishing certain rather
curious compounds between fiction and criticism.
The earliest of these is *Un Cheval de Phidias*, in
which, under the guise of conversations between
the suite of an æsthetic but volatile French
marquise who is visiting Athens, the question of
the source of beauty in art, and more particularly
in Phidias's sculpture, is treated. *Le Prince Vitale*
handles in a somewhat similar way the knotty
point of Tasso's madness; and *Le Grand Œuvre*,
a later work, and one which has more of the
fictitious element in it, entwines the history of an
ill-starred attempt on the part of "M. Adams,

Baronnet d'Angleterre," to grow a wife for himself, with the discussion of various political and social matters. There is much VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ. that is good in all these, and in the last in particular a really brilliant abstract of English constitutional history occurs. But on the whole the sense of incongruity prevails. One feels that the butterfly coquetries of the Marquise are merely a bore in the discussion of the beauties of the Panathenaic charger, or else that the Panathenaic charger is quite out of place in a boudoir; and that the objection of a Georgian girl to marry her master is of no possible relevance to the theories of Bonald and Joseph de Maistre. By his complete abandonment of the style, it is probable that the author came to feel this too. His first genuine novel, *Le Comte Kostia*, is, perhaps, still the greatest favourite with most people. It is very carefully, and, in parts, brilliantly written, and shows considerable originality of design. The Count himself, a civilised demon, as he is called, is drawn powerfully enough; but the Russian aristocracy have not much reason to present a testimonial to M. Cherbuliez. *Miss Rovel* is a picture of Britannic eccentricity; and though it has the remarkable novelty—to a Briton—of most such pictures, it abounds in clever writing and lively situation. *L'Aventure de Ladislas Bolski* is an interesting but a decidedly painful book. M. Cherbuliez has not Heine's bitter contempt for those *Polen aus der*

Polackei, who at one time swarmed and swaggered all over Europe, but his portraits of his hero and his hero's father are admirable sketches of the fatal instability of the Polish character. Ladislav Bolski, who dreams from his childhood of adventure, his anxiety for it being only equalled by his anxiety to be well costumed when performing it; who subjects himself to fantastic self-tortures in order to convince his justly dubious friends of his trustworthiness by living for a month on raw carrots, and scalding his arm with boiling water; who obtains the mission which he covets, ruins his chance of effecting his purpose through mere feather-headed folly, and at last disgraces himself by an abject written apology to the Russian authorities—an apology which is obtained from him by the wiles of a Russian Dalilah—might be contemplated not without a certain feeling of amused contempt and pity. But the author has piled up the agony too high. Bolski's mother dies of grief and shame; the friend who had guaranteed his fidelity amputates his own hand as a forfeited pledge; and the unfortunate Ladislav, after drowning his Dalilah, goes hopelessly mad, writing his history in a short lucid interval. This is an ending with a vengeance; but it savours somewhat of a corrupt following of *Titus Andronicus*. A similar instance of bloodthirstiness may be found in *La Revanche de Joseph Nqirel*, where the heroine having discovered a compromising secret

relating to her husband, can find no better way of getting out of the difficulty than by inducing a socialist work-
VICTOR CHERBULIEZ.
 man of her father's, who has long entertained a hopeless passion for her, to stab her and himself afterwards. *Surge, Carnifex!* is the exclamation which most naturally rises to one's lips after reading these two books, though both of them, especially the latter, are full of lively character-drawing and skilful description. The Mirion household at Geneva is an interior not to be forgotten.

Prosper Randoce I may mention as a third book the total interest and literary finish of which are not worthy of the powers displayed in its parts. On the other hand, *Paule Méré* is a novel to be very highly spoken of. It has, in contradistinction to those just mentioned, but few incidents, and depends entirely for its interest upon play of character. The unhappy loves of a girl whose pride and artistic sensibility clash with her affections, and of a man whose amiable disposition is tainted by a fatal instability and proneness to suspicion, form its subject, and it is, in my judgment, one of the best of its author's works. The two next novels, in point of date, *Le Fiancé de Mademoiselle St. Maur* and *Samuel Brohl et Cie.*, hold a middle place in point of merit, the former being a little below, and the latter a little above, M. Cherbuliez's average—an average, it may be said,

which would be pretty high for most novelists.

Le Fiancé de Mademoiselle St. Maur
VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ. is more after the plan of a common-
place novel than any of its fellows,
being merely the account of a fatal passion
for a brother's wife, but the treatment is good
and original. In *Samuel Brohl et Cie.*, a clever
knight of industry succeeds in investing him-
self with the personality of a deceased Polish
count, and all but carries off an heiress by
the trick. There is immense cleverness in this
book; the way in which the adventurer not merely
copies but actually assimilates the personality
of his partner being sketched with wonderful
truth. The heroine, however, is not very com-
prehensible, and even a little repellent, and the
other characters are unattractive.

The style of these novels has characteristics
not dissimilar to those of their design. It has
been accused of unnecessary *bizarrierie*, and it is
possible even for a foreigner to see that there is
occasionally some justification for the charge. Its
most obvious fault is an excessive use of idiomatic
and proverbial expressions, with which the pages
positively bristle at times, and which sometimes
give an air almost of vulgarity to the language.
On the other hand, at its best it is singularly
good. The descriptive passage quoted already
from *Le Roman d'une Honnête Femme* is a model
of its kind, and it would be very easy to match it
with a score more of the same sort. The dialogue,

too, is generally excellent; and M. Cherbuliez has a very happy knack of disguising, and rendering inoffensive, the long ^{VICTOR} ^{CHERBULIEZ.} parabases or discourses on things in general, which appear to be indispensable in French novels, and which are very apt to weary an English reader. In brilliancy and epigram there is hardly anything left to desire. Indeed, a reader given to find fault at any cost might consider that there was sometimes almost too much of this, and might incline to connect it with the undue quaintness and allusiveness of style already noticed. A truer and a more charitable view would be that the unrest and occasional *clinquant* of the style are chiefly the result of exuberant thought, and invention which cannot be satisfied without a surcharge of ornament and detail. There are, in fact, few writers of fiction who are less avaficious of their material and their work than M. Cherbuliez, and this liberality in the bills of fare makes it not very easy to criticise them from any general point of view; one novel having perhaps a general character in common with its fellows, but little similarity in plan, personages, or style of arrangement. It would seem, indeed, sometimes, as if in his pursuit after interesting and novel situations and characters, our author had benefited by a somewhat wider range of reading than is usual with his class, or was usual not so very long ago. He is apparently a good English and German scholar, and hence it

is, perhaps, that he has done us the honour to introduce to a French audience those old favourites of the English public: the wicked governess, the father who is mistaken for a lover, and the hero who wanders about at night and sees things that he is not intended to see. But whether his puppets have or have not previously appeared on any other stage, there is invariably a distinct and evident originality in his manner of setting them to work. His books hardly ever drag, and the critical reader of novels knows that this is a compliment which can very rarely be paid. They carry one along from beginning to end; and if the end is sometimes a little disappointing, that is a different and separate matter. I do not know whether it was from a study of English fiction or from his own mere predilection that M. Cherbuliez at one time preferred what may be called the indirect forms of narration to the ordinary straightforward narrative of the supernaturally omniscient novelist. He then liked to let his heroine reveal her thoughts and experiences to a director, to make his hero write to sympathising friends, and so forth. It is not always easy to keep up the verisimilitude of these devices, but M. Cherbuliez has generally been victorious over the difficulty. One of his means of overcoming it, however, is scarcely in accordance with strict morality. His heroes and heroines are most reprehensibly given to eavesdropping. They are

always in places where they have no business to be, to the great assistance of the plot, possibly, but to the disturbance of the finer feelings of the reader, which are not appeased by their occasional apologies. However, the plot does march, and that after all is the main matter, doubtless. As a second example I shall take *Meta Holdenis*, a book of great interest, in which this eavesdropping fancy plays a remarkable part.

VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ.

The hero, Tony Flamerin, is a French painter, a Burgundian by birth, and son of a wealthy retired cooper, who is naturally enough not too much delighted by his son's choice of a profession. However, he makes the best of it, and for some time stoically doles out to the prodigal the fortune which he has inherited from his mother. At last, when the greater part of this is gone, he sends for his son and lays the state of the case before him. An American uncle has, it seems, offered the young Raphael a place in his counting-house, on the very reasonable conditions that he shall learn English and German, and, as a sign of reformation, bring a wife with him to New York. On the other hand, he himself declines to countenance his son's wicked consumption of his capital any longer by acting as his cashier, hands him over the balance, some five hundred pounds, and declares, with much frankness, that if he does not accept his uncle's offer Tony shall never have another penny during his father's life. After a certain

amount of kicking against the pricks, Tony makes a sort of compromise sufficient to restore his father to good-humour, and agrees to go and learn German in Germany, being secretly comforted by the thought that the study of German is not incompatible with the practice of painting, and that there are worse galleries in the world than that of Dresden.

On his way to Geneva, the first stage of his journey, he meets with an elderly German who entertains him with conversation upon things in general, and in particular on the improvement of the lot of the suffering classes, the advantages of the Kindergarten, and the absolute necessity of developing early in little girls the habit of moral reflection and a feeling for the ideal. Tony, though conscious that this conversation is a little over his head, is rather flattered by the assumption that it interests him, and before leaving the carriage promises to go and see his instructor, whose name is Benedict Holdenis, and who combines with the profession of social philosopher the practice of the hardware trade. At Geneva he meets an old friend, an American of the name of Harris, and instead of making his way to Dresden, devotes his evenings to piquet with Harris, and his days to boating on the lake in the same company. One day when they have varied the amusement from boating to riding, it so happens that they stop to bait at a village inn.

At the other end of the harbour where we sat down was a table at which a whole family were picnicking. Standing up and facing me was a girl of about eighteen, evidently the eldest, who was engaged in carving a fowl. She had fastened a handkerchief on her head to protect herself from a sunbeam which shone right in her eyes through the leaves. The handkerchief was good in colour and attracted my attention ; the face underneath it attracted it a good deal longer. Harris asked me what I meant by staring so at a fright, and I answered him that he did not know what he was talking about. The fright was a brunette of middle stature, with hair of a deep chestnut colour, eyes of the clearest and softest blue, real turquoise eyes, and a beauty spot on the left cheek. She could not be called beautiful or even pretty, for she had too broad a nose, a square chin, and a biggish mouth with rather full lips. On the other hand she had the charm which cannot be defined, a skin like a nectarine, cheeks like those fruits which one longs to bite, a singular expression and air of innocence, soft glances, an angelic smile, and a voice with music in it. Finally, she carved her fowls to admiration.

VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ.

It must be an exceedingly dull person who does not perceive that the father of the damsel who is brought forward with these Wertherian surroundings is Herr Benedict Holdenis, and that the damsel herself is the Meta who gives name to the book. A general introduction, of course, takes place, and after M. Flamerin's scientific description of the handkerchief and its contents, it is not surprising to find him next day dining at the Holdenis's abode, idyllically denominated *Mon Nid*, and containing a very large number of nestlings. Meta, whose house-name is *das Mäuschen*, proves if possible more

adorable on acquaintance. She sings ravishingly, and performs all sorts of household offices, while the excellent Papa Holden sanctifies the whole entertainment (which is duly concluded by family prayers) with an unceasing effusion of sentiments, in which the purest morality is united to the most charming sensibility. The end of it is that this admirable man suggests that he shall himself officiate as Tony's German master, and the painter offering, with great ingenuity, to take Mademoiselle Meta's portrait, the two operations result in his passing every day a good many hours at *Mon Nid*.

She was a most complaisant sitter, and did not seem to be at all bored in my company. Her humour was serious and lively by turns ; when she was grave she used to ask me about the Louvre or the history of painting ; in her lively moments she would amuse herself by speaking German to me, and obliging me to repeat her words after her. The best of this was that it gave me an excuse to call her by her pet name of *Mäuschen*, which I used to drag into everything I said, because, as it was a very hard word to pronounce, it was obviously the best possible practice for me. At the end of each sitting, as a reward, she would sing me the "King of Thule." She did it with exquisite taste, and when she came to the last lines—

Die Augen thäten ihm sinken
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr,

her eyes used to fill with tears, and her voice, faint and quivering, seemed to die away. Such were our pastimes, but I personally had another. I used to look at her and ask myself whether my fancy for her was artistic or amorous ; I was not very long in finding out. One morning when she had taken into her head the unlucky idea of plastering down

her hair and hiding certain stray locks which used to float about her forehead, I lectured her on the subject, and pointed out that frigid ^{VICTOR} correctness is the bane of art. ^{CHERBULIEZ.} She laughed, and with a sudden gesture shook down the whole of her thick hair, which fell in a shower over her face. She remained for some minutes resting her elbow on her knee, with her sky-blue eyes looking steadily at me, across the chestnut tresses. I told you before that one sometimes reads in the eyes of these German angels something not altogether angelic. I don't exactly know what these particular eyes said, but one thing I did perceive clearly, and that was, that it was not as an artist that I loved them.

The introduction into this Paradise of a snake, in the shape of an ancient but intrusive Baron Grüneck, at first only quickens Tony's amiable feelings. Matters seem to be coming to a crisis; the excellent Holdenis, who has managed to worm out from his visitor all his affairs, succeeds in obtaining from him the greater part of his small capital by pointing out how wicked it is to carry about money in a pocket-book, when he, Benedict Holdenis, would be only too happy to give ten per cent for it. Tony is within an ace of making a regular proposal and setting off to New York with Meta, as a lively proof of his full submission to his uncle's wishes, when one morning he chances to behold, unperceived, his divinity contemplating with apparent satisfaction four words which she has seemingly just written. The four words are, Madame la Baronne Grüneck. He retires, and before he has recovered from this

shock the excellent Holdenis suddenly becomes bankrupt, and the four hundred pounds are of course lost. The idea of being jilted by the daughter and cheated by the father at the same time, is altogether too much for Tony's hot Burgundian head, and after a very short explanation with the one and none with the other, he goes off to Dresden in a pleasant condition of poverty and rage. The apparent end of the adventure is made by a letter from Geneva in which Meta encloses her jewels as part payment of her father's debt. They are, of course, far below the value at which the admirable Holdenis had estimated them, but the proceeding still strikes Tony as strange. He keeps one bracelet to meet his absolute necessities, and sends the rest back, a proceeding of very modified delicacy which rather characterises M. • Tony Flamerin. Then he sets to work seriously at his art, with the purpose of retrieving his losses. He has the luck to succeed, and, which is still more surprising, to forget Meta.

The chief instrument of his prosperity is a certain M. de Mauserre, French Minister at Dresden. He is a diplomatist of many virtues, and accomplishments, who not only lays the foundation of Flamerin's artistic fortunes, but makes him his most intimate friend, and consults him, among other things, on a plan which, with the best intentions, he has formed for running away with a

neighbour's persecuted wife. The painter's advice on the point is sensible enough, but has about as much success as advice ^{VICTOR} ^{CHERBULIEZ.} in such a case would be likely to have, and M. de Mauserre executes his project as far as the very ill-natured conduct of the husband, who altogether declines to fall in with the scheme, and apply for a divorce, will let him. Half a dozen years pass in which Flamerin establishes his reputation as a painter; and M. de Mauserre, after spending some time in Italy, establishes himself at his own estate in the Franche Comté, having with some difficulty induced his neighbour, M. d'Arci, husband of his daughter by a dead wife, not merely to overlook his escapade, but to receive the lady who, in a necessarily small circle, enjoys brevet rank as Madame de Mauserre. They have one small child, and for her the ex-Minister is very anxious to find a suitable governess. With this rather incongruous commission he charges Tony, who is still his great friend and factotum, notwithstanding his artistic dignities and the fact that he has inherited a very pretty fortune from the old cooper, his father. In dying, the old man who, with plenty of respect for his son's successes, has no particular opinion of his prudence, has given him some paternal cautions.

He had entirely left off scolding me and had become almost affectionate; his intellect was still quite clear, and, taking my hands in his, he gave me some earnest advice, the wisdom of which seemed above the lowness of his estate.

He kept repeating to me that our impulses are our greatest enemies, that the main point is to know how to govern oneself, that it is easy to gain but hard to keep, and that the discipline of the will is the only secret of durable successes and lasting happiness. One night while he was talking thus a cock crew hard by: "Tony," said my father, "I have always loved the cock's crow; it proclaims the day and puts to flight the phantoms of the night. The sound is like a war-cry, and it always reminds me that we ought to pass our lives in fighting against ourselves. Whenever you hear the cock crow, remember that it was the only music your father cared for."

The next night, also at cock-crow, the old man expires, and thus clenches his moral. To return to the thread of the story, Tony goes to Geneva to execute his commission, or to speak more correctly, to find out why a Genevese pastor, to whom M. de Mauserre had originally applied, had failed to execute it. The pastor very naturally replies that he hardly likes the responsibility of introducing a young woman to a *ménage* of such a kind, but the eccentric American, Harris, turning up for the purpose, undertakes the duty, which Tony, not believing him to be serious, abandons willingly enough. When he has arrived at Les Charmilles, as M. de Mauserre's habitation is called, some slight doubts occur to him and to his host as to the prudence of the arrangement, and a very short and practical epistle from Harris announcing that an incumbent for the post, of whose name, antecedents, and qualifications, he gives not the slightest intimation, is actually on her way, and will arrive

shortly, does not relieve their anxiety. However, the carriage is sent, the mysterious governess appears, and turns out to be VICTOR
CHERBVLIEZ. Meta Holdenis.

The young lady, who has been kept by the ingenious Harris quite as much in the dark as her quondam lover, settles into her place with a great deal of tact. She tames her rather rebellious charge at once, makes herself more or less useful and agreeable to the other inmates of the château, and half disappoints, half piques, M. Tony Flamerin by showing every sign of letting bygones be bygones, and of neither wishing for nor intending to give explanations of old times. Indeed she appears very much more bent on reforming her pupil and the household, which its mistress has hitherto pretty much allowed to govern itself, than on renewing old flirtations or encouraging new ones. To a man of Tony's temperament this is of course a provocation, and he proceeds at the end of a week or two to fancy himself once more violently in love with the girl whom he has very peaceably forgotten for half a dozen years. The inevitable explanation at last takes place, appropriately or inappropriately, in a cemetery, and Meta, with great candour and ingenuity, points out that she had always supposed Tony's sudden flight to be due to her father's ruin only, and that as for the unfortunate Madame la Baronne Grüneck, it had been written as a jest by one of her younger sisters. Being thus put completely in the wrong,

the artist makes a formal offer, but Meta, pointing out that she has some reason to complain of his impulsiveness, insists on his repeating it at the end of some two months, that is, on the first of September, when she will give him a decided answer. He at the same time explains to her, for the first time, the peculiar relation of her employers to each other, and does not find it remarkable that it seems to give her cause for a good deal of reflection.

In a few days, however, it strikes him that Meta, always anxious to serve everybody, has suddenly become particularly anxious to serve M. de Mauserre. She takes his daughter's place, as his amanuensis. She almost saves his life by nursing him through a pleurisy. Meanwhile Tony, to pass the time and to transact some business, has gone to Paris, whence he is rather mysteriously recalled by Madame d'Arci. The day after his return he has full opportunity of understanding the reason, for he overhears a conversation between his beloved and her employer, which shows pretty clearly that the ingenious Meta has made up her mind that a widower with £8000 a year, and only a left-handed wife, is better worth playing for than a bachelor artist without incumbrances. To make his suspicions sure he schools a gipsy fortune-teller who has been his model, and through the gipsy's lips warns Meta "not to course two hares at once." But he cannot make out exactly how this affects her:

On the 1st of September a picnic is organised by M. de Mauserre to the neighbouring Lake Paladru, apparently for ^{VICTOR} ordinary reasons, but really, as Tony's ^{CHERBULIEZ.} eavesdropping has informed him, to have a rendezvous with Meta. However, Tony succeeds in taking her for a sail alone on the lake, and there charges her point-blank with the determination to make M. de Mauserre marry her. She vouchsafes no direct reply, and while he is declaiming, one of the squalls so common in mountain lakes comes on.

Meta raised her head, her half-open lips drank in the wind and her bosom swelled. "I will say the 'King of Thule' once more to you," she said; "listen." And in her old voice she recited the lines which, thanks to her, I knew by heart. Every moment the wind kept freshening, and a sudden squall striking the sail made it by turns flap the mast and strain it almost to splitting. The lake had changed from green to gray, it was flecked with foam and began to bristle as if in ill temper. At a sudden movement of Meta's the boat lurched sharply and shipped some water. "Take care," I said; "if you don't we shall infallibly capsize." She had now come to the last stanza—

Er sah ihn stürzen, trinken,
Und sinken tief ins Meer
Die Augen thäten ihm sinken,
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr.

She repeated these four lines twice, and then she looked at me with a singular expression. She took her hat off, the wind played with the hair that floated over her forehead, her cheeks were in a blaze, and in the depths of the eyes which she bent upon me I saw strange madness dancing. "Your gypsy lied," she said; "did she not predict that I should live a hundred years?" and in a lower voice she

added, "We were to have settled to-day whether we should pass our lives together. Since you will not live with me, I will die with you." With these words she put the helm so violently down that the next moment the boat had its keel in the air and your humble servant had six feet of water over his head.

Of course Tony saves both himself and his eccentric companion. But the *coup*, whether premeditated or not, has its due effect, and while the two are being dried he discovers that he is again as deep in love as he has just been in water. Unfortunately or fortunately his remarkable tendency to eavesdropping gives him cognisance of an interview between Meta and M. de Mauserre, in which the young lady appears to have entirely forgotten both the lake scene and the gipsy's caution, and in which the ex-diplomatist goes so far as to make her promise that she will not marry Tony without consulting him. On the return to Les Charmilles, this remarkable game of battledore and shuttlecock becomes still more exciting. Even Madame de Mauserre's indolence perceives what is going on, and on the other hand Meta's perverseness, or whatever it may be called, embroils the whole matter to an almost incredible extent, most skilfully rendered credible in the novel. At one moment she represents herself to Madame de Mauserre as a persecuted victim of her employer; at another she becomes the Meta of the lake again, and bewitches the indignant Tony back into submission; at a third she continues her old rôle with M. de Mauserre, and, as a

final effort, even tries to make him believe in the existence of undue familiarity between Tony and Madame de Mauserre. This ^{VICTOR} last ingenious stroke recoils upon her; ^{CHERBULIEZ.} his jealousy revives his old love, and the falsity of the charge being easily proved, sentence of banishment is pronounced unanimously on the intriguer.

But her last bolt is not even yet shot. Late in the night before she quits the château, Tony hears a gentle knocking at his door, and Meta enters as a penitent. She develops a quite surprising faculty of justifying herself, and hints that all her encouragements of M. de Mauserre were merely intended to pique the jealousy and assure the love of the somewhat too light-minded Tony. As he greets this explanation with a mixture of wrath and contempt, she becomes warmer, she declares that she adores him, that she only lives for him, and at last she flings herself at his feet to take or to leave. Her excitement very nearly succeeds in disarming his prudence; but at the last moment a vigorous cock-crow comes to his rescue, he remembers his father's caution against impulsiveness, he rises to his feet, raises the prostrate Meta, and with extreme politeness shows her to the door.

An epilogue recounts how, in a railway carriage some months afterwards, he overhears a Protestant deaconess, whose hair is chestnut and her eyes sky-blue, cautioning two younger companions against the immorality of the French nation, and

instancing as a proof thereof the attempts which had been made upon herself by a great French diplomatist and a celebrated French painter, attempts from which she had been with the greatest difficulty preserved, by the joint action of their mutual jealousy and the grace of Heaven.

VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ.

I am by no means satisfied that I have succeeded in this necessarily brief abstract in giving a satisfactory idea of a very remarkable novel. M. Cherbuliez's books, indeed, are so full of matter that abridgment of them is by no means easy, and the abundant incident and complicated character in which he delights are hard to compress. Thus, in this book, I have had practically to leave out of sight the excellently drawn sketch of the grumbling and almost brutal but sound-hearted Comte d'Arci, and to keep in the background that of Madame de Mauserre herself, whose Creole indolence and lazy disposition to think the best of everything and everybody help the plot not a little. But the main excellence of the composition, I hope, has not been wholly lost. It lies in the contrast between Meta and Tony, and in the curious nature of the girl. Both are thoroughly impulsive. But the Frenchman's impulsiveness is merely spasmodic, and at the command of his senses chiefly. Meta, in every sense, hunts two hares at once; her brain, her conscience, her heart, her imagination, are all constantly occupied in following half-a-dozen different tracks, and her

freaks result from the temporary supremacy of one or the other. From the first description of her, in which M. Cherbuliez, while denying her positive beauty, has, with extreme skill, given her exactly those "lineaments of gratified desire" which Blake justly declared to be most irresistible, to the last scene where she humbles herself in vain, she is admirable, and one almost forgets her moral obliquities in pity for her evil fate in falling in with a lover not content to take the chance of being deceived at the price of possessing such a deceiver.

VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ.

This kind of mixed interest—partly personal attraction to the characters, partly admiration of the way in which they are portrayed—is the great charm of our author's best books; and it is certainly very far from a common one. The first score or hundred novels that a boy or girl reads are able to affect him or her in the way of personal attraction with no difficulty. But in minds of any critical turn, however small, the personal interest soon wears away, and can only be excited again by work of somewhat exceptional truth and art. The spontaneous "I wish she had not yielded," of Walter in *The Princess* is the best possible tribute of admiration to a novel, and there are few of M. Cherbuliez's books in which some such exclamation does not occur to the reader at the end of his reading. In most of them, too, the tide of interest which carries us

along is steady and well sustained. Hence he is one of the most readable of novelists; and it is, perhaps, not the least merit of a novelist that he should be able to be read. Again, he has a merit still less common than this. One not only reads him, but remembers him, and this is what can be said of too few of his brethren. His situations may be strained, bizarre, or anything else, but they dwell in the memory, and the niche which they occupy is one which one does not regard with indifference. Gilbert Savile on his nightly journey across the roofs of Castle Geierfels; that most learned youth, Raymond Ferray, diving desperately after the lost body of Miss Margaret Rovel while the said body is perched triumphantly in the tree branches over his head; Isabelle la Sérieuse senseless at the foot of the statue of Nemesis-Psyche with the gray dawn and her husband contemplating her; above all, Meta Holdenis, her voice rising as the mountain winds rise over Lake Paladru and the last lines of the "König in Thule" inspiring her to give them so startling an interpretation, are not pictures to be forgotten. Even in his less successful novels there is no lack of those masterly sketches which impress themselves on us without necessary reference to their setting. Maurice d'Arolles as he sees the second dark red rose on the bosom of his brother's wife; Conrad Tronsko's irony as he receives the traitor to Poland, and himself pays

the penalty of his protégé's infamy; Prosper Randoce describing his literary career to the astonishing provincial who has actually bought, read, and admired'

VICTOR
CHERBULIEZ.

Les Incendies de l'Ame; Samuel Brohl confabulating with his ghostly partner in the wood by Cormeilles—these are not vulgar creations. No doubt it is not sufficient to strike out a few happy ideas like this, and it is necessary, in order to gain the reputation of a master, to attend more carefully to the composition of the whole picture than M. Cherbuliez has sometimes done.

Non omnes omnia, however; a maxim which the critic of so complicated and irregular a composition as the modern novel is especially bound to remember. Nor is it true that the inability to end what he has begun always distinguishes M. Cherbuliez. Neither of the books of which I have attempted to give an abstract in this article is open to this charge, and both, if we except a certain *longueur* apparent in parts of the *Roman d'une Honnête Femme*, are novels as free from defects as they are full of merits. The same may be said, in a less degree, of *Paule Méré*. Moreover, there is one point about him which is worthy of special notice. Hardly any novelist has repeated himself less, or has, in a comparatively short space of time, produced so many independent and original characters and situations. In novel-writing the faculty of invention is of the very first importance,

and to one who possesses it in so considerable a degree very much worse faults of style or composition might be forgiven, than any which can be justly charged on the author of *Meta Holdenis*.

Since the time at which the foregoing essay was written M. Cherbuliez has made considerable advances in literary status and dignity, having been elected of the Académie Française in recognition partly of his novels, partly also of his political journalism (in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* chiefly), under the *nom de guerre* of G. Valbert. He has also been very industrious as a novel-writer. *L'idée de Jean Téterol* appeared shortly after the publication of my essay, and has been followed at intervals of about two years by others, such as *Noirs et Rouges* (clericals and republicans), *La Ferme du Choquard*, *Olivier Maugant*, *La Vocation du Comte Ghislain*, *La Bête*, and most recently of all *Une Gageure*. This last is perhaps the most interesting of the latter series, the conjugal problem which it presents being of a class not dissimilar to that of the *Roman d'une Honnête Femme*, and the book winding up with a very strong scene of the kind commented upon above as M. Cherbuliez's forte. It also includes, oddly enough, another instance of that eavesdropping which has been noted as a favourite device of his. Indeed, the persistency of recurrent motives and tricks is illustrated in too many of his later volumes. I do not know, however, that on

the whole they can be said to have increased M. Cherbuliez's rank as a novelist, nor am I surprised at this. Despite his ^{VICTOR} ~~CHERBULIEZ.~~ frequent power over incident, character, and situation, even his earlier work too often makes me think of a criticism I have heard passed upon more living English novelists than one—that they are very clever men who have bought their quires of paper and said, "Go to, let us sit down and write a novel," rather than born novelists who had their novel ready to write. And in such cases, though there is often no very glaring inequality or descent in a much later work, it is seldom that the later runnings are equal in sprightliness to the earlier. The work gets more and more mechanically produced, less and less spontaneously evolved. In M. Cherbuliez's particular case, moreover, there has sometimes been a special appearance, notably in the cases of *Olivier Maugant* and *La Ferme du Choquard*, of a deliberate endeavour to write on subjects which the Naturalists have already made popular, without treating them in the naturalist manner; and this appearance, though it may be delusive, does not diminish the seeming lack of spontaneity.

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